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B. CRACOWSKI

# SAMUEL LANGFORD

## *MUSICAL CRITICISMS*

*Edited by* NEVILLE CARDUS

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# PREFACE

SAMUEL LANGFORD was musical critic of the *Manchester Guardian* from 1905 until he died in May 1927. He was born in 1863, of a South Manchester family which can be traced back through the history of Withington and Chorlton for more than a hundred years. His father was a nursery gardener—a calling Langford himself loved and followed to the end of his life. To quote from the obituary written by Mr. Herbert Sidebotham for the *Manchester Guardian*, 'S. L.' was 'a romantic rather than a business gardener. He was brought up in the love of flowers . . . but whereas the father managed to combine sentiment and business, they had to be put into commission with the sons, one brother looking after the business, and Sam, the other brother, looking after the sentiment of floriculture'.

Langford began to educate himself without perhaps knowing he was doing so; he read for pleasure, acting unconsciously on Samuel Butler's principle that it is best not to worry about learning anything in the arts until the 'not knowing it' becomes a nuisance. He turned to music, and before he was twenty he was able to take on the duties of organist at a district church. It was then decided that he should have a musical training and he was sent to Leipzig, where he was a pupil of Carl Reinecke from 1896 to 1900. Mr. J. R. Broadhurst (a name which always will be honoured by boys of the Manchester Grammar School) had a good deal to do with Langford's career at this point; it was on Broadhurst's advice that Langford was sent to Germany. The musical education was undertaken for its own sake; Langford's father had no settled plans at the time about his son's future. He perceived 'S. L.'s' gifts and decided they should if possible be brought to flower.

Round about 1905, when Mr. Ernest Newman was musical critic of the *Manchester Guardian*, Langford was chosen occasionally to act as deputy critic. It is not too much to say that Mr. Herbert Sidebotham was one of the first to see that Langford had in him the makings of a writer on music. When Mr. Newman left Manchester Langford after a lapse of time was chosen to succeed him. 'By his musical knowledge and accomplishments,' Mr. Sidebotham has written, 'Langford was qualified to follow Mr. Newman and Arthur Johnstone, but he was diffident about his power to collect his ideas after a concert and express them rapidly in writing. For Langford, though a man of very wide culture, was self-educated in letters, and he had not the professional training of the writer. He set himself, after he had turned forty, to learn the art.'

For more than twenty-one years Langford wrote on music, seldom away from the columns of his own paper. His output was so prodigious that the selections from his work given in this book have been made from more than a million words. The difficulty of editing Langford will be realized best by those who knew him for a man whose mind could not anyhow or anywhere deal in the commonplace or the compartmental. Once he learned his job, writing with him was much the same as conversation—an instinctive outpouring of a full mind. He never became routined or 'professional' either in his life or in his work. Obviously, he was not the sort of writer whose work easily submits to the broadest system of classification or rejection.

I have not dared to try to make 'S. L.' in this book appear more like the formal man of letters he would himself have chosen to appear had he ever attempted book-making. He used to echo Goethe and say that all good writing was in the shape of 'occasional pieces'. Because it was not practicable to give to 'S. L.' a book

of unprecedented size and looseness, these 'dippings' into his work may easily have the effect of seeming to place him 'in diminution', so to speak, in the eyes of those who came to know him by reading him day after day for years, and in the passing of time, got the sense of Langford's bigness by, to use the term of Henry James, the process of saturation. These selections have merely exhausted one or two seams in a vast mine; I who knew Langford well, and worked in the vicinity if not in the interior of the said mine, realize keenly enough that countless other seams have still to be worked and their rich stuff brought to the surface.

NEVILLE CARDUS

MANCHESTER, *October* 1928

## 'S. L.'

'S. L.' did not express the whole full man of himself in his writings on music; his wit, his love of ironical though kindly sport at one's vanities, his gusto for the rich life of the common, everyday world —you had to know him intimately before all these traits in his nature were made manifest to you. In his work 'S. L.' was reverent always; in his conversation he was frequently irreverent—but never at the expense of the great composers. 'S. L.', indeed, seldom talked music to his closest friends; he hated to be called a critic of music. 'I'd rather be thought a gardener,' he once said to me. And he never seemed quite so happy in a concert-room as in his garden at Withington. He loved life and nature even more than he loved art; any attempt on the part of a biographer of 'S. L.' to present him in terms of a bookish or academic man would surely stir his ghost to a sardonic chuckle. 'I'd put down the best book or the best score in the world', said he, often enough, 'to speak to a man.' And then he would add 'Or even a woman!'

It was because of the very expansiveness of 'S. L.'s' nature that many of his casual acquaintances who thought they knew his main characteristics pretty well did not understand him by half. He was so various, so big a man, that one could diligently explore his nature week by week, year after year, and find some fresh and rare trait every day. Success in life, said Walter Pater, is got by man's ability not to form habits; he must awaken anew at every dawning of day. Langford's interest in life never wearied; every time one met him he had become aware of some fresh aspect of the world's passing show. And he saw everything from a point of view entirely his own. In all that he said and did he was 'S. L.'. If to be one's own self through and through is to master the art of life, then Langford was the most triumphant man I have ever met. Never did he compromise his essential mind, blood, humours, and ways of expressing himself; you had to take 'S. L.' for what he was, body and soul; never would he conform to any 'fashionable' mode of thought, conversation, manners, or action. Yet with all his

individuality, nobody could ever complain that 'S. L.' was in the slightest degree arrogant, or that his indifference to conventional habits of life and society was at all assertive. So unaffected was he, so oblivious did he always appear of his own original self, that the most decorous person in the world would have felt thoroughly at ease in his company, and, moreover, would quickly have found himself drawn towards the lovable little man. Not that 'S. L.' often went out of his way to be lovable; the nature of the man worked behind his own back, so to speak; he won your affection not by laying himself out to do so, but simply because in all of his moods, friendly or caustic, sympathetic or sceptical, the basic humanity of him was bound to be felt in good time. Only you had to have patience at first. 'S. L.'s' character was subtle and, on the face of it, contradictory. He would say withering things, and I am afraid that people often went out of his company thinking that his tongue was terribly sharp. But Langford's 'leg-pulling', his ruthless play of words upon some foible in an acquaintance, was merely his fun; it gave him so much glee that he could never deny himself the pleasure. 'S. L.'s' banter at a friend's cost was really the measure of his trustful fellow-feeling; it is the privilege of the true lover of men to make happy fun of their absurdities. I doubt if ever he tried to score a witty point over anybody that he did not really like.

His love of conversation was immense. No matter where he happened to meet you the moment he saw you he gave a tongue to wisdom, wit, and friendliness. Even along Market Street or down the Strand at the busiest part of the day, his flow of speech would suffer no stay. A vehicle might separate you as you both crossed the road; when you discovered him again yards higher up the thoroughfare you would find that his discourse had travelled a few paragraphs farther on during your temporary and enforced absence from his side. Though he revelled in argument he never talked to prove a case. He talked for the sheer joy of the quick cut and thrust of words against words; moreover, conversation with Langford was the best way of establishing a human relationship. The course of his talk was very like his own movements along a street

—ample, casual, and apparently of no settled direction. In rapid sequence he would say wise or humorous things about Mr. Baldwin, Goethe, Land Values, Johnny Briggs, Brahms, Marriage, Free Will, the National Debt, Prohibition, Shakespeare, and Delphiniums. Whenever he did talk about music—which was not often—he had no use for the academic or professional attitude. Never would he chatter about technique; usually it was of music as the work of a man, philosopher, poet, lover, or tragic-comedian that he spoke. To think of Langford as one who had a taste for abstract metaphysical disputation is nonsense; his wisdom was sweet from contact with the soil and simple folk. As far as his lovable nature allowed him to detest anything, he detested forms and systems. 'The art of good writing, good talking, and good living', he once said to me, 'is discursiveness.' His favourite phrase for any one he liked and admired was 'He 's a full man'. Langford was full to overflowing. He carried his scholarship as freely and as easefully as he carried his capacious garments; he acquired knowledge not by deliberately seeking it out, but by living wholeheartedly and curiously wherever he happened to be. He had no use for learning in the abstract. He assimilated no idea that did not have the smack of earth or the dust about it. I have known him attack what he called 'selective education', because it tended to hinder the direction of a man's 'natural energy of spirit'. I never in several years' close contact with him saw Langford with a book in his hand outside of his own house. He would have scorned to read whenever or wherever the activity of human beings went on around him. And his books at home were all of a piece with the man himself—collected haphazardly, but every one of them the product of a real man, a real mind. Goethe and Shakespeare were his favourites; he read affectionately in Keats, Wordsworth, Hazlitt, Shelley, Heine, the Elizabethans, and Robert Burns. He occasionally spoke of Shaw, Wells, and Bennett, but thought that Conrad wrote with such difficulty that he ought not to have written at all.

Another legend about 'S. L.' must here be nipped in the bud. Writing was not a slow, painful business with him—at any rate, not after his first few years on the *Manchester Guardian*. Between 1916 and

1927 I must have seen him write hundreds of articles, most of them a column in length. Seldom, if ever, did his pen cease in its even movement onwards, and never did he glance back through the pages of his copy. He would come to his desk from a Hallé concert at ten o'clock; an hour later usually saw him on the top of the Palatine Road car—probably discussing the Cup Final with the ticket inspector, while the ticket inspector searched on his hands and knees for 'S. L.'s' ticket. Langford was the quickest writer I have ever known in a newspaper office. He was much more of a journalist than is generally understood, and he read the newspapers omnivorously. Here again, his taste was catholic; he would go through a report in the 'football edition' with as much interest (and possibly more) as he would an essay in the *Fortnightly Review*. Langford recognized few of the customary distinctions that mark off man from man and class from class. So long as it was honest, every mode of living interested him.

Memory will affectionately hold hundreds of pictures of him; it will see him always shuffling along to a concert, entirely ignorant that he is ten minutes late; it will see him sitting in his seat, his fine head resting on his hand during a slow movement by Beethoven; it will see him searching aimlessly (the terms are not contradictory as applied to 'S. L.') through his pockets for a concert ticket and finding at last a ticket for an engagement held a year ago; it will see him at his piano in the low music-room of his Withington home, playing Brahms, and looking rather like Brahms as his stumpy fingers plough through the music, sublimely indifferent to a handful of wrong notes. I shall never forget an evening in June, very late and silent, when he leaned over his garden gate and talked to me of Shakespeare's lyrics and the fragility of loveliness in life. The air was full of the scent of his flowers, and the simple tender wisdom of his speech seemed part of the beauty of the summer night. But of all my memories of 'S. L.' perhaps I shall hold tightest the picture he made once at Old Trafford during a Test Match. He sat in the front row, with the grass in front of him, between two perfect strangers, both honest uncouth men. And as he chatted lightheartedly to them, he ate a huge piece of currant

cake and the crumbs fell down his crinkled, untidy waistcoat. Dear old Sammy; is it true that the great juice of him will flow no more? It is hard to believe we shall not again find him amongst us, for there was as much about him, surely, of elemental and undying nature as there was of mortal, lovable man.

N. C.

# MUSICAL CRITICISMS OF SAMUEL LANGFORD

## *BACH'S B MINOR MASS, HALLÉ CONCERT, MARCH* 1924

ALTHOUGH the third successive annual performance of Bach's Mass in B minor by the Hallé Society did not solve all the many difficult problems of Bach choral singing, it had its sublime moments, and throughout it was a finely conscientious effort both to perform and interpret the most difficult of all choral works. The sublime 'Sanctus' was once more the finest and most perfect movement of the whole. There is no doubting now the interpretation of this movement, and its execution was carried out to perfection. We speak with diffidence of what we thought was a rather too detached execution of the waving triplet quavers in the strings just at the culmination of the movement, not knowing what the composer's actual directions were. But in every other way we felt the movement superbly done, and that the undulating quavers were really given with an undulating effect we had the admiring testimony of listeners who were not looking for any such thing. Such testimony is more valuable than that of any technical expert. In this movement we have the original prototype of how many Lisztian and other symphonic poems in which the heroes are crowned with eternal garlands, in the most tedious ways. Bach's garlands of divine harmony are neither tedious nor obviously descriptive, and perhaps they escape the one thing because they are not the other. And of all ground basses, surely the bass of this movement is the most original and the most sublime. In some of the more rapid and more softly expressive movements of the Mass one felt that a smaller number of voices would have given effects less tentative and more definite; but in the sublime march of this movement one felt grateful for every voice. 'He planteth His footsteps in the sea,' says the Psalmist, but though such an expression carries us far, it is by no means adequate as a description of this divinely moving bass part. The notes in their octave leaps are like vast pillars, not sunk into the deep, but embracing in their height and depth an imagination of both heaven and earth, and if

we add the sea, the combined images will not complete what one feels from the music. Such music, indeed, fulfils all those ideas in which music becomes itself a symbol of the entire universe. We see in its laws, as in a glass, the divine equipoise which is our ultimate conception of the universe itself. It is a modern notion that music cannot be poetic unless it is picturesque. When Bach sets his universe of music rolling, we do not ask what he is describing, but are transfixed by the power and sublimity of music itself. We ask for no other similitude or form, but feel ourselves in the presence of formal beauty in its very essence. Such music transcends everything it tries to express, and we are carried up into it, not by the remembrance, but by the forgetting of every other thing. Everything passing is but a symbol, says the wise Goethe, and music, in one sense the most swiftly passing and intangible of all mortal things, is in another the essence of the imperishable. Bach's music is perhaps not to be regarded as expressive in any detailed way. If we take as witness the many editions of, say, his forty-eight preludes and fugues, we find the utmost contradictions among the most expert of editors.

## *GUSTAV MAHLER, AMSTERDAM*, 1920. I

THE Mahler Festival in Amsterdam, at which the whole of Gustav Mahler's works are to be performed, marks also the twenty-fifth year of Willem Mengelberg's connexion with the Amsterdam orchestra. The devotion of the Festival to the works of Mahler is an act of singular devotion to the music of that slowly acknowledged composer, and doubtless is intended also as a tribute to his memory and to his friendship with Mengelberg. It was the way of Mahler to raise a band of devoted admirers wherever he went, and almost as certainly to make enemies through the exacting nature of his demands on all with whom he came in contact. For he spared neither himself nor others. Whoever else might live on music he and his must live for it, and with an exhaustless energy.

So we find his career as forceful and as changeful as that of any military commander. Hurried from the Conservatoire in Vienna, he begins as conductor in an insignificant position in Upper Austria at nineteen, and goes thence to Cassel, Prague, Leipzig, Pest, Hamburg, and finally to the Vienna Opera, only to tire out the ambition of the Viennese and make a flight to New York, where his star sets at last and his career ends in the sharpest discord with his surroundings. Among other circumstances of his rise, one specially interesting to us is that Mahler succeeded Richter at the Vienna Opera, whence Richter migrated to Manchester. Common judgement placed Mahler before his death at the head of all conductors in the world. In this art he held that clarity was the source of every other virtue, and it was in his untiring pursuit of every other virtue through this means that he was so exacting with himself and everybody.

In composition he kept the naivety of the child throughout his days, and his music is still, on that account, a stumbling-block to the learned and the men of haste in our public musical life. He is in this aspect a disciple of Bruckner, whose own music is still with us quite unknown in the bulk, and is still a rock of offence on account of its ponderous length and the naivety of its emotions. Both Bruckner and Mahler composed a set of symphonies equal in number and more ponderous than those of Beethoven, and these works are still a challenge to our critical estimation. Both composers are gradually reaching the public ear in Germany, but the war inevitably cut off the tentative appreciation of our English public, and there is small prospect that we shall quickly regain the ear and patience for German works of this length and character. The Mahler Festival in Amsterdam comes, then, as an unexpected boon and opportunity to the musical enthusiasts of Western Europe.

In his relation to the modern problem of programme music Mahler occupies a peculiar place. He was born in 1860 in the little village of Kalischt, in Bohemia, and though he left there while still a child, that child remained in him till the end. In his early songs, which were set with orchestral accompaniment to folk-verses from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, both the melodies and the instruments were

imagined in the terms of the country life he had left. This life remained the light of all his seeing. When he came to write his symphonies he took again the snatches, instrumental or vocal, of these orchestral songs, and made them, in more or less obvious allusion, the key to all his poetic and musical feeling. He never entirely separated the instrumental from the vocal imagination in music. There was no such deliberate resort to the voice as the crown of everything as in the Choral Symphony of Beethoven. The voice was merely felt as essential to the ideas, and its use was unavoidable. It is a part of Mahler's naivety that the animals and the angels have their place in his rejoicing. His song turns more and more into the nature of a hymn in which all nature is bound together by love. His Eighth Symphony, for instance, which is choral throughout, is in its first part a symphonic choral setting of the hymn 'Veni Creator Spiritus', and the second a succession of symbolical passages from the second part of Goethe's 'Faust', where in the turning of the poet's exquisite dactyls things are made to pass before us as in a glass, and the heavenly wisdom is unfolded in a divine ascent which wins the heart into a more serene atmosphere with every turning line.

In this text, which runs in its contemplation through the whole gamut of nature, taking in as much the animal and the natural world as it does the spirit and the intellect of man, we get the best idea of what the symphony of Mahler always had in contemplation. If the technical resources of the art of music were enlarged, it was that this contemplation could be made more simple, more all-embracing, the more direct and the more thorough. It has always been the case that in this kind of expansion the sympathy of the restless and the impatient has been foiled. We had in Manchester during the first year of Mr. Balling's musical direction a symphony by Mahler. The interpretation was casual, and the melody for the most part strained beyond its naive and easeful expression. The miscalculation might be ever so little, but it was sufficient to remove the composer completely from the general understanding. In that circumstance we had set before us the whole difficulty that lies in the appreciation of such composers as Mahler and Bruckner.

It does not follow even that Mr. Balling's direction of the music was faulty, for the naive is made of little effect in its working by only a slight admixture of restlessness and scepticism among its interpreters.

There is, then, no solution of such problems as the Mahler question, except by the familiarizing process of time. In England it is not at all likely that the problem of Mahler's music will be taken at all seriously during the next few years, though if such a thoroughgoing disciple as Mengelberg were to introduce even a single work at his English concert engagements, and even a single success was really gained, the public would then approach the composer with a different mind.

## *GUSTAV MAHLER, AMSTERDAM*, 1920. II

WHEN a man of genius has died prematurely it is natural to look back for the signs where death has touched his mind and genius in its approach. All are agreed that with Mahler the approach of death had a peculiar pathos, closely bound up with his art and manifested in reflections of the greatest beauty. Always a writer stronger in his gentleness than in his open strength, his notes of resignation have a quietude of will which all must admire. The view that the great dramatic period of the composer's middle symphonies was itself a strengthening of the will to this end, and that the second half of his directorate at the Vienna Opera was marked by a sense of decline and defect in his worldly activities, coincides with this view. 'The Song of the Earth' comes after his 'Nature' Symphony, and is a symphony, or symphonic setting, with alternate tenor and contralto solos, of six songs from *The Chinese Flute* of Hans Bethge. Bethge is the most successful of the many poets who in the field of Oriental romance have been emulous of our own FitzGerald. *The Chinese Flute* is translated freely from Li-Tai-Po and other Chinese poets, and is one of the most beautiful collections of lyrics in modern German poetry.

Mahler himself has made some few and notable alterations in the

poems chosen, in order to strengthen their symbolism as a farewell to life. The closing phrases have become almost watchwords among Mahler's disciples. The work is indeed the kind of immolation which a man could not well go through twice, and in that sense its close may be likened to the close of Wagner's 'Tristan', though the idea of love conveyed in it is something more ethical in its quality. But it is a Tristan only in miniature, for if 'The Song of the Earth' is supreme in beauty among Mahler's works, it is because its touch is of the lightest and it ravishes the heart by the sheer wonder of its certainty and its magical technical brilliance. Whatever Mahler may have lost in his latest years, there is no doubt that he gained so much in the fineness and complexity of his counterpoint that his melodies at last transform themselves into a complete harmony far more satisfying to the musical ear than the bald virility of his earlier symphonies.

In 'The Song of the Earth' the instrumentation takes on the fineness of Ravel in 'Mother Goose' and such miniatures, with the difference that the music is warm and full of the deepest feeling. 'The heavens are blue for ever, and the earth will stand fast for long and blossom in the spring; but man, how long hast thou to delight thyself?' is the note of the opening drinking song, and then follow the song of 'The Solitary in Autumn', of 'Youth', of 'Beauty', of 'The Drunkard in Spring', and the solemn songs of 'Farewell'. The types are well known, but the expressions are of singular beauty, and the music is a sheer felicity of poignant delicacy.

We do not think there is to be found in music a score where the magic of dancing melody and the inventive faculty of magical orchestration together make such an effect. It is no mere felicity of happy touches. The composer is master of his craft in every note. We get used to regarding the orchestra here as something which will reproduce whatever effects the composer may desire, with unfailing certainty. Part of this sensation is no doubt due to the composer's skill in writing for the orchestra. However extreme his demands they never sound unnatural for the instruments. But the skill required of the players is immense. In his later works the long holding notes for the violins, in the highest reaches of the

instrument, seem to go on for pages without any rest from the strain, which demands a flawless intonation at the peril of everything. Yet the ear is never disturbed or even anxious, so impeccable are the knowledge and execution of the music. The wind instruments are used in the most daring combinations and transitions, but the certainty is the same, and we get to regard perfection of execution as everywhere a matter of course.

The work of the four solo violinists, and especially of Mr. Louis Zimmermann, has been marvellous in its tenacious enthusiasm and flawlessness on every occasion. The labour devoted to the Festival is the secret of its success. All the symphonies have been given many times by the orchestra, even the Ninth Symphony eight times, the Choral ten, and the rest running up to forty-four times for the Fourth Symphony, and over thirty for several. The orchestra of 150 players is hard at work each morning, from nine o'clock till one, with never a wasted minute. There is a wise leisure in the concerts themselves. The Ninth Symphony makes up a concert in itself, and 'The Song of the Earth', which is hardly so long, is also given separately, and though there is a long pause between each of the long symphonic movements there is no applause, nor at the end until a decent interval has passed. The gain of the composer's art in harmonic fullness was brought home very convincingly in the performance of the Ninth Symphony. The work is frankly distraught and tortured in its intention, and includes a 'Rondo Burleske'. Yet in all its extravagance we never felt the ear-piercing sensations of our first nights here, but rather through every bitterness a warm depth of harmony wholly satisfying to the musical nature. The symphony bears all the character of epilogue, as though in the fiery movements the composer is burlesquing himself, and it closes with an adagio, turned down as it were from the main key of the work, which is D minor and major, into D flat, in which key the symphony ends.

The composer also shows signs in this symphony, and especially in the closing adagio, of the developments of harmony exemplified in the slow movements of Max Reger. We get the same richly sustained stress of melody, and a full-tone movement of melody

maintains the symphonic dignity as artfully as in the music of Reger itself. The style is a distinct break from all that Mahler has allowed himself hitherto, and indicates that harmonically he might have been found in line with Reger had he been born twenty years later. But Reger did not live to show us whether he had the symphonic nature of Mahler at all. The Ninth Symphony of Mahler shows the scherzo, as ever, playing a most important role in the work. Mahler's power in developing a diversity of humour and a sense of abundance in the form is as fruitful as his effort is untiring. Out of the abundance of technical and orchestral device he speaks as one whose humour knows no end. And at the end of a scherzo that would have left every other composer out of breath he sets off straightway to enlarge himself in the 'Rondo Burleske'. Here he harks back, for his main theme, to an ejaculation in the scherzo of the 'Tragic' Symphony, and riots with a tune which twists about in major thirds as if it were trying to get out of the key, like a pigeon that is trying to get out of the cote. A hell-let-loose sort of combination of melodies follows, as of laughter not holding both its sides but splitting them; but, as we have said, there is a fullness of harmony which prevents the tumult from splitting our ears like the less humorous melody of the composer's earlier heroics.

The opening of the symphony, and the closing adagio, are obviously meant as an instrumental pendant to 'The Song of the Earth'. The composer takes leave of us again in the language of pure music, saying over in a more deeply expressive way the things which the text of 'The Song of the Earth' told us in so many words: 'I go my way to the mountains'; 'I await my friends, who tarry overlong'; 'I go to my house of rest, for my soul has need of quickening'; 'Love, love is eternal, eternal'.

It is a pathetic feature of Mahler's end that during the last four years, which he spent in America, he wrote nothing at all. We are ourselves convinced by the last period of Mahler's work that he belongs to the great line of composers, and that his harshness, which is not in any sense a modernity in him, but an austerity of method, was something unessential. We are at the moment fully to be excused for an impatience with what is lengthy or tedious,

and still more with what is harsh, in German music. But if we neglect Mahler during the next few years it will be very much to our own loss. His music would restore a freshness to our concerts which they very much lack, and a greatness which they have somehow lost. Perhaps the task of studying Mahler adequately is one for which at the moment our musicians are not naturally disposed. The neglect of the Mahler Festival by our English musicians, easily explicable though it is, is much to be regretted. But Mr. Willem Mengelberg is undoubtedly the greatest Mahler authority in the world. Is it too much to hope that in the near future, either with his own wonderful orchestra or with the best of ours, he will be afforded an opportunity to make our public acquainted with the general aspect of Mahler's music? So much should at least be done.

## *GUSTAV MAHLER, AMSTERDAM*, 1920. III

THE orchestra for the Mahler Festival numbers 158 players. The Concert-Gebouw, where the Festival is held, has all the appearance of a well-subsidized national institution, but is really in the hands of a society that must be a model of its kind. The concert-hall is lofty, with a narrow, high-built gallery that leaves the area almost completely open, and is also cut off so as to leave the orchestra room to expand and rise over the entire width of the broad-set building. The whole is surrounded by a handsome two-story foyer.

Amsterdam has no longer any doubts about the genius of Gustav Mahler. The audience, of some 3,000, has all the air of serious musical culture found among the Germans, and it applauded with much the same admixture of rapt enthusiasm and sentimental aspiration for the art of music. There were no misgivings, but everywhere the unstinted veneration and enthusiasm of a Wagner Festival in Munich or any other German music centre. As with Wagner, so with Mahler—one must, indeed, be either an apostle or an unbeliever. He will have all or none, and has left his music in such a form that we must either give up a great part of our musical lives

to it or may as well let it alone. Mahler himself was quite right when he judged that not in his own day could the world settle the question of his general acceptation. To be naïve and to be direct are not quite the same thing, though Mahler did all that was possible to make them so, and a writer may be both and yet come short of the sincerity of emotion without which nothing is true or enduring in the arts. There are some grounds for suspicion of Mahler's emotional sincerity in his art, in spite of his naivety and ruthless directness of style. He is a Jew and a Catholic, and while there is every reason why a Jew should show sympathy with Christianity from its origin and make it prominent in his art, the Jewish-Catholic standpoint is complex to the normal sensibilities. Then Mahler was in his musical life as conductor one of the most energetic, ruthless, exacting, and tyrannical musicians the world has seen. We use here but the language of his admirers. It is hardly common to find a man of this energy and restlessness emotionally so childlike. As a composer he apparently placed all the amazing technical knowledge acquired in his converse with the world at the service of the most childlike directness and simplicity. We are ourselves convinced of his integrity and thoroughness in this endeavour. We find the thoroughness at times appalling to our ears in its results. In his first three symphonies (which we were too late to hear[1]) this uncompromising spirit is tempered by the freshness and sensibility of youth and by the gentleness of lyrical ideas from his first songs which is everywhere diffused. In the middle period of his Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Symphonies, which we have now heard, Mahler shows his spirit wrestling with the hardness of the world. He speaks somewhere of Strauss as his own antipodes, and as one eminently made to enjoy his immortality in his own day. To our own feeling he shows himself during this mid-life struggle not a little envious of Strauss, and too much akin to him in the excesses of the drastic style. His approach to these excesses and the defence of them in his music are somewhat different. The grounds of his orchestration are to be found in his adherance to simplicity as the condition of creative art. We find him everywhere singling out the

[1] [Good old Sammy!—N. C.]

instruments which will realize most clearly and most directly his poetic and picturesque ideas. He is almost purely melodic from the beginning to the end of all his musical creation, and melodic often in the barest and starkest way. He disdains everything that would soften and in softening cloud his melodic effects or ideas in the least degree. Hence in his fidelity to life we often get an abrupt transition of mood, to which only extraneous thought can supply the key, and for which the musical sensibility in itself is in nowise prepared. Hence also we get an extremity of characterization beyond every example save that of Strauss in his most violent moods.

In Mahler's music generally there is a union of the childlike with the metaphysical. And in the middle period of the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Symphonies, when his manhood was especially put to the test, we find his music filled with a spirit not unlike that of Strauss, and as little to be restrained in its expression. In these moods he resembles not only Strauss but Elgar by his generation of an overwhelming melodic weight, swiftness, and energy. Here he allows his melodies to jar in the boldest and baldest way, with little or no thought of harmonic softening or clothing. That this daring helps his special gift as much as it endangers our sympathies in these extremes will be understood. There are no clouds to mar the grace of his winning melodies, and we hear no instruments but what are finely apt for their eloquence and simple directness. And this incomparable knowledge of the orchestra makes the essays of grandeur less hazardous in their bareness and daring and less fatal than the same bluntness and singularity in a less masterful hand would be.

An example of his most exquisite naivety was seen in the lovely closing movement from the Fourth Symphony, on the song 'Wir geniessen die himmlischen Freuden', where the pleasures of heaven are presented in a sagaciously worldly and literal way, and with all the gusto of the peasant's relish for them. The poem is set in the symphony for the soprano voice, and was sung with the most remarkable discretion of style by Miss Gertrude Förstel, of Leipzig, who had the advantage of having sung the solo also in Vienna under the direction of Mahler himself. We do not remember to

have heard from a German singer before any such unity of vocal beauty with all the detail of poetic discretion. It all sounded the most natural thing in the world. In every line some new grace or happy turn of thought and expression revealed itself, and the whole had a supremely beautiful and unwearied vocal sensibility. One could like Mahler in this mood and presented in this perfection without any more questionings than his most enthusiastic admirers. In the Fifth Symphony, which followed, the Faust spirit of the middle period breaks out with a tragic intensity. Its opening march movement, and the march tempo of the allegro movement in the sixth, give these Symphonies the guise of a pitched battle against the world and the demons of life, such as we find in the 'Pathetic' Symphony of Tchaikovsky. But in Mahler's music there was more of the Straussian will to conquer. He is more serious than Strauss, and his struggle is more openly one of moral temper. The Fifth Symphony finds its solution in an apotheosis of the art of music itself, but though the comparison is made by its admirers with the close of Mozart's 'Jupiter' Symphony, the struggle of mind to get to this standpoint of classic art, and the turbulence or intractability of the material used, make the comparison a very distant one. Though Mahler is an out-and-out diatonic writer, he has not the fastidiousness of ear which Mozart kept through every complexity of his art. Both the finely developed scherzo, which has a humour that recalls now Beethoven, now Mozart, and now Bach, and the fugal rondo, show Mahler working with the manifold melody of music in the way that proclaims him a master, and a worthy contrapuntalist in the Straussian spirit of daring freedom. These movements are in a sense an epitome of the musical elements up to our time, but they do not give us the sense of perfection and ease we get from Mozart's greatest finale. We should say that none of the classic composers has been such an out-and-out melodist as Mahler, and that his division from them lies in his unwillingness to curb his melody within the true limits of harmonic polyphony. The melodic spring and temper of his music get the upper hand of every other consideration, just as in Strauss, but he is not content like Strauss to forswear his contrapuntal nature and take refuge in finely blended

discordant harmonies, but keeps the stark naivety of the melodic diatonic style through every harshness that it brings upon him. Mahler himself tells the story that Bülow (who, when Mahler was at the Hamburg Opera, conducted in the concert-room sometimes as though Mahler were the only person in the audience) put his fingers in his ears as Mahler played his own music for him; and when Mahler had ended said that if that were music then he had no longer an ear for music.

It is possible that such a feeling may be coupled with a great deal of genuine admiration for Mahler's music. His worship of clarity, directness, and naivety, both in his orchestration and his melody drives him to such extremes that he demands in the end more adherence to these qualities than the less enthusiastic ear will grant, and after charming us he thwarts the admiration we have been compelled to give. With his lighter hand he draws us to and with his heavier thrusts us from him. He dares in his melodic and instrumental combinations what none has hitherto attempted, and were he not a giant in experience of the orchestra his venture in these directions would not have had anything like the success it has achieved. Were this success not greatly imposing, backed by a manifest integrity of endeavour, and a technical knowledge that is in itself amazing and in the last degree fascinating to the technical musician, such a tremendous demonstration in his favour as the Mahler Festival in Amsterdam could not have come to pass. It is held by some admirers to be a final decision, and that henceforth he will take his place among the greatest masters. With every admiration for his melodic gifts, his instrumentation, and his power of building up a work, we are not yet won over completely to his view. We are attracted by his genius, but repelled by what seems a too rigid adherence to a system.

## *ELGAR, FEBRUARY* 1922

Now that the end of the war has brought back to us the conception of music as an international art—the one common speech of man—it has sent us back to our English composers with

the question, 'Can they stand this test?' and it is significant that the question has brought the music of Elgar once more into a special prominence. Mr. G. B. Shaw, faced with the question whether Elgar was one of music's immortals in the world sense, answers first that his toughness makes him that or nothing, and then gives his answer in Elgar's favour. But even Mr. Shaw admits that to announce this view is to anticipate the verdict of time; and an Englishman may be forgiven if he prefers to linger more lovingly on the English traits of Elgar's genius. The world, as musicians think of it, is still a very long way from being a complete world, and includes only the main cities of Europe and, latterly, a few cities in America. And even regarding it as no more, this world of music is still a very long way from acknowledging Elgar as a world-master, and America has not even the excuse of a strange language for its neglect of his choral works. But these considerations will not greatly trouble any one who reflects that the first necessity of art is to be indigenous, and that, given a secure fame in that view, world-fame scarcely matters. To our own feeling, the true revelation of Elgar's music has been found, not everywhere in England, but is bound up with certain golden days of autumn when, sitting in the cathedrals of Worcester, Gloucester, and Hereford, we have heard Elgar himself at work, conducting the succession of his choral works which, more than the music of Mendelssohn, Handel, or even Bach, have vitalized the music of the Three Choirs Festivals in recent years. Here, in these works, we have known music, as music everywhere ought to be—an art indigenous, creative, serious, free, and life-quickening, as it can become only under such conditions. The consciousness that an art has grown up to maturity from the very ground on which you are treading, and is bearing its blossom and its fruit all around you, is something very different from the feeling that it has been brought to you from a very long way, or that somewhere, in a distant country, there is a man who has something to tell you for your life's delight and your soul's good if only you will take the requisite trouble to get to him. For this reason the creative element is necessary everywhere for an art to flourish and for us to be fully conscious of its beauty and delight. It is more to the point

that Elgar's music should work this kind of miracle in the place where it is made than that it should maintain a doubtful place side by side with the already sufficient masterpieces of the world.

Sir Thomas Beecham has told us that when he stood up under the blue sky of Italy to conduct what he had judged were masterpieces of English music he found that for Italian conditions there was something wrong with them. They may not be, on that account, the less vital for us, but may even be more so, for they may apply the more strongly to our own case. For if the delight of art is something divergent from the delight of life, it is in some sense a reflection of it, and unless life were sometimes sweet art itself could have no sweetness. Elgar's music may, under certain conditions, be felt as cold; but it also has in its coldness a great intensity. Elgar also has in his work as a practical musician this peculiar combination of gifts. He comes on the scene, and a great seriousness pervades it. To hear him begin, say, with the overture to 'Gerontius' is to experience a chill seriousness which no other experience in music can afford. There are plenty of other things in music which bring as tragic thought, but they do not affect us in the same way. And though much of Elgar's music is in its essence and purpose lively, it all produces upon us something of this Gerontian expression. We feel it as something in Elgar's very regard for the art of music. To other people music may be something sensuous, lighthearted, or casual. To him it is something serious, intense. He said in his young days that the air was full of music, and that you had only, so to speak, to open your hand to catch it. Yet the suggestion of a later musical work of the composer is that all delight is fugitive, and this view applies more forcibly to Elgar's sparse and deliberate way of working.

It is as true of him as of Beethoven or Wagner that he comes out of each work a new man. There has been but one 'Dream of Gerontius', but one work lyrical and perfectly unified. The 'Dream of Gerontius' before Elgar touched it was hardly to be called a poem. Like a hard, rocky substance, it was as nothing until the waters of music had flowed over it and the creeping plants of musical embroidery had worked their roots into its being, and,

thus softened, its hard substance was seen to imprison a heart. Its unity and hardness kept the composer to his task and wrung from him a masterpiece.
'Gerontius' was first appreciated in Germany, where it has left, as far as one can judge, no influence. In England it changed the face of music. It emancipated the English composer, and, however weak he may be still, he has since 'Gerontius' written in freedom and after his own heart. Elgar went on to write an oratorio. 'The Apostles' is in bulk and power a greater work than 'Gerontius'. The composer's idea had both unity and greatness, but he endeavoured to carry it out under the old delusion that a Biblical work needed only to be Biblical to have literary life. When the composer's main idea of a pontifical apostolacy came strongly upon him he brought forth great music in the composition of 'The Apostles', but it was very much by his own power and very little by a compelling poetic impulse. He went on farther, to write 'The Kingdom', and in these works there were already the signs of a ripeness more intent on mellowness of effect than on directness and energy. These works had a tremendous influence on the development of choral singing in England, which was only dispersed by the outbreak of the war.
Richter had at this time taken Elgar as it were on both shoulders and held him up for the English people to worship. The result was seen in Elgar's first great breakaway from choral writing—the heroic Symphony in A flat which was dedicated to Richter and first performed by the Hallé Orchestra in Manchester in December 1908. A great future was expected for the symphony, but its popularity is hampered by its heaviness and great length, and the smaller second symphony on Shelley's words 'Rarely, rarely comest thou, Spirit of Delight' is now generally held to be the more beautiful. Apart from these works of scope, Elgar turned aside to write, during a winter in Italy, a number of difficult and very beautiful part-songs, apparently designed for use at competitive festivals, but in difficulty so far overshooting their mark that they are in bulk still insufficiently known.
After the war Elgar brought forth unexpectedly a group of chamber

works which form a very fine nucleus for a modern English school of chamber music. He could hardly by any extension of his purely orchestral works have done anything quite so serviceable to English musical life. In still another field—that of the concerto—he has written two remarkable works. His own early love of the violin and the proximity of Kreisler prompted the first, and here again his innate seriousness of aim saved him from the common error of meretriciousness and enabled him to succeed beyond every expectation. We have left out of account the variations, overtures, and symphonic poems. All these works, notably the Enigma Variations, which had so marked a romantic quality that they almost linked him with Schumann, are worthy of a composer who has been everywhere so serious in his aim as to do all things well. His work is so uniformly good that no one has yet attempted to say which of all his compositions will most assuredly outlive him.

## *ELGAR AND 'FALSTAFF', SEPTEMBER* 1913

SIR EDWARD ELGAR, in his Symphonic Study 'Falstaff', written for the Leeds Festival, appears to have carried the use of music as literature a step farther than it has hitherto gone, and to mean his work to serve something like the purpose of a literary essay. It is the first 'study' ever written for the orchestra, and in the composer's notes to the work he tells us that the term should be understood in its literary use. The music is by no means based on the generally accepted idea of Falstaff's character, but seems rather intended as a vindication of him, to set the world right about him. First, it is based, the composer explains, 'solely on the Falstaff of "Henry IV" and "Henry V", and in listening to the music the caricature of Falstaff in the "Merry Wives", which unluckily is better known to English playgoers, must be forgotten'. He quotes Morgan, who also ignores the 'Merry Wives' and who held Falstaff to be a conception hardly less complex, hardly less wonderful than Hamlet, compact of marvellous incongruities, without either dignity, decency, or honour, and yet a knight, a gentleman, and a soldier. Against this he cites Professor Dowden's

judgement, that the Falstaff of the 'Merry Wives' was but a fat rogue dressed up from the back premises of the poet's imagination. Sir Edward Elgar, indeed, takes what he calls the real Falstaff so seriously that he writes his typical theme, and four out of the five movements of his 'study', in the minor key. He reminds us of the august company and stately occasions to which Falstaff is admitted in the earlier stages of the plays, and of the fact that he was once 'page to the Duke of Norfolk', and notes, 'almost with pain', the gradual deterioration of his conversation, his company, his morals, and even his humanity, from his brave beginning down to his squalid end. One of the interludes of the symphony is even a dream picture of Falstaff as page to the Duke of Norfolk, and is written on a sprightly, pianissimo theme and intended, among other things, to suggest what Falstaff 'might have been'.

Another instance of the refinement of the composer's imagination may be found in the one major movement of the work, which is a scene in the Eastcheap tavern. As the composer rightly says, this scene 'would not be complete' without Hostess Quickly and Doll Tearsheet, to say nothing of the 'twelve or fourteen honest gentlewomen'. He has therefore introduced a theme to stand for this 'most virtuous company', and this theme he afterwards develops and raises to 'due importance'. Eventually it is transformed to a nightmare that lends a touch of horror to Falstaff's drunken dreams and his approaching death. There are, of course, mellowing features in Sir Edward Elgar's views of Falstaff which all will agree to admire. Many will doubtless admire his music, too, who may not agree entirely with his conception of Shakespeare's fat knight. The music will also soften the composer's ideas of Falstaff, and present them more sympathetically than words can do. In words, at least, a set study of Falstaff's moral nature must seem beside the mark and a little incongruous, if not ungenerous, as an appreciation of his boundless humour. Falstaff lives to himself, and is so much a being of the imagination that, as Hazlitt says, he 'is himself almost as much an actor off as on the stage; and we no more object to Falstaff in a moral point of view than we should think of bringing an excellent comedian, who should represent

him to the life, before one of the police officers'. It is almost as bad to vindicate his conduct, or in any way to examine it critically. Tragic thought is reached by concentration of ideas; humorous comedy by a regal squandering of the wealth of the mind. There can be no greatness of humour unless all bounds are let loose. There is a critical type of comedy—the comedy of good sense, of which the greatest example is Molière, and the best examples in our language are Congreve and Meredith; but just because it is in its essence critical, it is no peer in imaginative force to the world-embracing humour of Falstaff.

## *ELGAR'S 'FALSTAFF', HALLÉ CONCERT, NOVEMBER* 1913

SIR EDWARD ELGAR had, we believe, a good deal of difficulty in getting even a fair performance of his Symphonic Study of 'Falstaff' at the Leeds Festival, and its complexity both as music and in its programme will no doubt make it difficult for a time both to play and to understand. This performance had many merits, but the reception of the work was hardly enthusiastic, and clearly we shall have to wait a while before the public judgement of the work can be ascertained. 'Falstaff' may safely be said to be Elgar's most Straussian work, and is far more manifestly derived from the musical 'Richard II' than from the Falstaff of 'Henry IV' or 'Henry V'. It has abundance of caprice, such as 'Till Eulenspiegel' is compact of in Strauss's music, but such as the Shakespearian Falstaff never knew. It is also full of the romance of life's futility, such as we get in Strauss's symphonic poem 'Don Quixote'. This quality comes nearer to Shakespeare's Falstaff, but is not proper to it. There is nothing quixotic in Falstaff, for although he lives in the imagination he is never heroically the fool of it. As to the regrets, either for his lost prospects of gentlemanly place, which Sir Edward Elgar makes to haunt Falstaff's dreams, or the moral regrets which he suggests might darken his dying moments, they are surely quite inconsistent with the exultant joy of life which is inherent not only in the body but in the spirit and imagination of Falstaff. It is true that Shakespeare, in the person of the new king,

turns against Falstaff, but he by no means intends the heart of his reader to turn against him. The reader's sympathy should be with Falstaff, whose heart is 'fracted and corroborate' through the wounds given by unfeeling and upstart virtue. Elgar's Symphonic Study should rather, in its moral aspects, be entitled 'Harry the Fifth' than 'Falstaff'. And what are we to think of its feminine aspects —its picture of the Hostess, Doll, and the rest of the honest gentlewomen of the tavern? In Elgar's music do they muster up an ounce of beauty between them? If he holds them virtuous, so much the more is he bound to have made them beautiful, and not a mere bevy of cackling laughter and leers. Whoever before attempted to describe woman without some continuance of melody? Elgar's one figure of beauty—his one figure described in melody—is Prince Hal. He is made the true spirit of the feminine in the piece, and he has the usual apotheosis accorded to the heroine of musical tone-poems. Elgar indulges, like Strauss, in gargantuan intervals and leaps, but while in Strauss these intervals are naturally melodious and buoyant, in Elgar they need to have energy imparted to them by detachment. For this reason Elgar's music runs through the mind with difficulty, and is apt also in its interpretation to be disjointed and broken. His style is hardly inherent in the notes. The theme which he himself calls 'ambling' is intended to suggest the journey in the open air, and perhaps with difficulty might be made to give an ambling impression, but was in this performance only disjointed in effect. The passages which are intended to suggest the bandiment of wit do not come out clearly at all, much less piquantly. The romantic picture of the wood at night brings an element of feeling beautiful in itself, but not at all according with the farcical element in this night episode. Elgar is, of course, quite entitled to see Shakespeare through his own eyes, and we have got to labour to see with him as best we may. When the requisite freedom of interpretation has come into this work, it will probably be seen to possess abundant energy and fancy, as almost all his music owns. But whether these virtues will ever come to have a Shakespearian aspect to other ears than his own or to the majority of listeners is less certain, and to us appears unlikely.

## *ELGAR'S FIRST SYMPHONY, NOVEMBER 27, 1924*

ELGAR'S First Symphony proved a test for both the conductor and the orchestra; and scarcely less so for the audience. Our own feeling about the performance was that it did not always carry the full sweep of the music, but was good more spasmodically than continuously. Elgar should sweep or drift along with a movement that can rarely be felt as attack, but more as a strong forging ahead, or as an energy of rapturous fancy. We felt the second movement as somewhat too rapid for the working of the sentimental fancy, and not until the slow movement was reached did we seem to get near the heart of the work. The last movement had more elements of material grandeur, and they kept it well above the toiling of the first movement. The work still sounds peculiarly composite. Almost everything that was in the air at the time the work was written seems called into service. The controlling theme is something stolen from the symphonic poem and adapted to the symphony, though of course César Franck had already made use of this method both in his symphony and in his chamber music in the symphonic form. The triumphant method of the final movement is that of Liszt; the symphonic development has the sinew of Brahms. The exultation and main force of the brass writing tell us of Richard Strauss. Yet with all these things we feel they are borrowed as quite legitimate technical aids, and are transformed into the composer's own being. The slow movement has a spiritual emulation of the D major section in the slow movement of the Choral Symphony. The symphonies came in the full flower of Elgar's genius. Elgar is one of the few composers who wrote good music inspired by the war. If he had written a symphonic work 'To the Unknown Warrior' it could hardly have been more appropriate in a general sense than this First Symphony, and it might have been much less so. The work was written when heroism could still be conceived in the abstract and without rancour. There is nothing cast-iron or militant about this gravely moving theme, and the incidents in which it is set are so clearly episodes of life that they have a vitality and freshness that relieves the general heroic idea from all sense of strain. Brahms had written his heroic C minor Symphony, and also his others; César Franck had written his heroic symphony; Mahler had turned

the whole series of his symphonies almost into a personal epic; and all the influences of these works had softened into Elgar's mind. He once openly confessed, in touching words, how small he reckoned his personal achievements compared with the formal greatness of Brahms's symphonic works. There is no reason why we should disagree with his words, or yet belittle his music because of them. The First Symphony is obviously written in a spirit of devout culture. Its devotion may seem a little too apparent. But we may take it also that no public performance so far has anything like exhausted the spiritual beauty, or even the formal beauty, of the work. When we can say with confidence that our players have finally conquered its difficulties our public should have a vastly better appreciation of the work than it can have to-day.

## *ELGAR'S SECOND SYMPHONY, MAY* 26, 1920

THE concert of the South Wales Festival held in the Empire Theatre, Cardiff, hardly seemed to have awakened a corresponding spirit in the public of the city, and the attendance was quite inadequate to the importance of the concert itself. The concert was, indeed, the most significant of the Festival, and was dedicated to the most aloof and austere types of beauty. Sir Edward Elgar conducted his own Second Symphony, which has the motto from Shelley, 'Rarely, rarely comest thou, Spirit of Delight'. The work when given recently in London under Mr. Adrian Boult aroused so much enthusiasm that it has lifted the conception of Elgar as a composer higher than it has ever stood, and this new estimate of his genius was especially marked among the leading players of the orchestra.

The composer's own presence as conductor of the work to-day was felt, therefore, to bestow a special dignity and ceremonial status on the Festival performance, and small as the audience was, the composer could not have had a more enthusiastic or more cordial reception. His recent bereavement gave also an additional note of solemnity, and the appropriateness of the work could not but be

felt with the beauty of each passing movement. Shelley was of all our poets the most naturally a symphonist. He differs from Swinburne in being a symphonist without any system of over-conscious art. No other writer has quite the same natural rise and fall or the same lyrical impulse. The symphony of Elgar may well be called a 'Shelley' symphony. It sings not just the fugitive nature of beauty and joy, but the rarity of their quality. Elgar once said that music was so much immanent in the air that you might almost put out your hand and catch it. Something of this feeling we take to be expressed in the Second Symphony.

A very few years ago the problem of aerial flight was so little elucidated that every one was sceptical about its possibilities. It was very much the same with the subtleties of melodic flight in this symphony. In the experimental performances before the war the thing would not rise, and though the players laboured with it the result remained heavy and comparatively lifeless. How different to-day. The music really seems to inhabit the air. Not until the last movement do we lose the sensation of its buoyant triple rhythm, for the dotted notes of the slow movement are hardly felt as more than a substitute for the blithe circling of the triple figure which fills with its life the whole of that lovely opening movement. The rondo, again, only breaks out into a more rapid and complex development of this rhythm in which the notes flash hither and thither, leading a mazeful dance of pure imaginative forms. The composer has written no work so free from the alloy of heaviness or from the brutalities of the military measures which have sometimes ruled over his more prosaic moments. The slow movement is as solemn as anything he ever conceived, but it is written in the terms of pure beauty. It was the finest of all in the performance of yesterday. How delicately all its sequences of revolving harmonies were turned and poised. Harshness there was none. We learn afresh, from such a work, to prize our emotions of beauty. The composer has not set himself to be austere, but the lines of beauty are so clearly conceived that the music shines, the sun glistening on its wings as it passes with a touch so light that the intensity of our delight is as quick as tears.

## *ELGAR'S 'THE APOSTLES', HALLÉ CONCERT, MARCH* 1926

THERE were distinct signs at the performance of 'The Apostles' that the culture of Elgar's music is now once more progressing rapidly. The interpretation of the work might be thought, in the old Richterian view, to be short of vocal emphasis at important points; but it was sensitive through every note of the work, and that means that Elgar is now treated in the right spirit, and the degree, more or less, of absolute success in the performance is a matter of much less importance and one that will right itself. The chorus is, of course, newly constituted since the last performance of the work, and is a lighter if more sensitive medium of expression. There were times, especially in the sectional singing, when a greater vividness should have been secured, both in the loud and in the softer singing. And the culminating effects of the full chorus were often unduly orchestral in their balance. But these shortcomings were as nothing when one could set against them a sensitive delight in every bar of the music and a type of expression which linked itself up everywhere with the singing of the finely equipped body of soloists. One could feel everywhere that soloists, chorus, and orchestra were like a single instrument under the control of the conductor.

No composer stands to gain so much from this development as does Elgar, for he is almost the first composer to give to a sacred choral work a markedly orchestral colouring and character, and to make the chorus itself but a fragmentary, though essential, part of the whole. 'The Apostles' should hardly be regarded as a work in itself, and it scarcely answers, in any complete sense, to its title. It becomes towards the close more like a 'Passion' music than a missionary work; and the balance is not redressed until we hear its sequel, in 'The Kingdom'. While 'The Dream of Gerontius' owes a great part of its success to its singleness of idea, 'The Apostles' labours under the difficulty of being not only an incomplete but a composite work. The performers are apt not to realize sufficiently the difficulty the composite nature of the text makes for the listener. A deliberately changeful style is absolutely essential to the listener's understanding, and the more striking the particular lines of the text may be, the more insufficient a connected style of performance

will generally prove. The connecting idea of 'The Apostles' is, of course, the body of Roman Catholic doctrine. An Anglican Churchman will need to be both a well-informed and very sympathetic listener to follow this connexion easily. Elgar, it has often been said, is more partial to 'The Apostles', in the musical sense, than to any other of his choral works. That partiality may be justified, though there is an ideality about 'Gerontius' which no work with a text so composite as the text of 'The Apostles' can ever own. A work so dependent also on representative themes as is 'The Apostles' must also lack, in the pure musical sense, ideality of structure. Elgar uses the method of development both like a master and like one who is well aware of its dangers. The texture of his music is always as reticent as it is emphatic of these illegitimate connexions. The thousand forms which his themes take are all woven into the absolute tissue of the music. In that virtue they justify themselves wholly.

The work was favoured with a finely chosen set of principals. There was a time when the chorus singers and the general audience went almost wild about the splendid singing of Miss Muriel Foster in the Elgar oratorios. Last night we found some of them recalling those days of their first enthusiasm, and realizing that in Miss Muriel Brunskill we have now a singer who will challenge every comparison that the past can bring. She is a tumultuous singer, and in that quality is a greatly dramatic singer. One cannot quite be sure that in her Mary Magdalene drama comes first always and vocal tumult as its second. Sometimes, perhaps, vocal tumult is all, and dramatic intensity may seem more or less accidental or secondary. But in any case there is a sense of greatness, of passion, and of vocal tumult that floods the music with beauty. Mr. Norman Allin as Judas is a figure as memorably dramatic. He succeeded, past all precedent, in making even his soft singing vividly dramatic. And for sheer tumult and force he is overwhelming. Miss Dorothy Silk is a singer who contrives to do miracles with what seems after all but a small amount of tone. Discretion and incisiveness of style combine in her singing to make an exalted style of the greatest purity. That inborn spirit, able to pierce, is always in fine music when she sings

it. Mr. Herbert Heyner was vocally a little rough for the part of Jesus. But his discretion was also so great that he reconciled us to the roughness as an essential element of pathos.

## *THE THREE CHOIRS FESTIVAL*, 1924

THE delight of these festivals to the visitor is not at all to be reckoned by the mere list of the music to be given. The beauty of the west country is something which ripens with the fruits and the harvest to the fall of the year, and as the western rivers make their way down to the sea amid the mellowness of the autumn time, the mellowness of music finds a cadence of sympathy as it echoes and dies in the calm of the cathedrals which in other places it does not own.

The festivals also are peculiarly associated with the music of Elgar, and it is hardly too much to say that he who has not heard Elgar's music at these festivals only half knows what Elgar is. Elgar is a romantic spirit, the roots of whose being are in the past, in a way that cannot be felt everywhere as it is felt here. Worcester, the faithful city, is faithful enough to the associations in which his music is born to give it a setting that takes the imagination back far enough to feel whence its strength has come. The very walls cry out to us from the same romantic past that has bred his music. His music, heard within them, is redolent of England in the complete sense which in other places may fail it. Musicians are now for the first time venturing to think of England in that full sense which makes the Tudor period one with our own. The cathedrals are the best of all places for that realization. Not yet have we come to the full liberty which shall make the music of that period current as it should be among the music of our own. But the time comes. An Elgar looks backward and finds for us in that backward look a modern heritage; a Holst looks backward farther, to the pagan origins of religion, and finds a means of blending our ancient religious music with the newest musical science of our day. England, it is said, has a genius for happy compromise, and if that genius

means the power to draw sustenance from associations which are supposed to be long dead, the music of England, as it is heard in the western country, may rightly illustrate its power. We are older than we can conceive; and therefore, it may be, in the modern sense, more powerful than we know. Whether an Elgar and a Holst look more firmly backward or forward, who can say?

## *DR. VAUGHAN WILLIAMS'S SYMPHONY, JUNE* 1922

DR. VAUGHAN WILLIAMS is nothing if not comprehensive in the titles of his symphonic works. Having already written a 'Sea Symphony' and a 'London Symphony', he has now continued with a 'Pastoral Symphony', which appropriates what was left of sea and town and country.

These works have the merit that they may be said to represent the native man as opposed to the spiritual or ecclesiastical man in him that finds expression mainly through the cultivation of archaic modes in music. The 'Pastoral Symphony' cultivates modal types of melody also, but one does not find that its expression is scholastically restricted to the archaic type, as, for instance, in the amazingly clever and even beautiful G minor Mass which Dr. Vaughan Williams has published. The melody in the Symphony is modal, but the man is free, and the emotions he expresses are such as require no archaic sympathies to feel and understand, and one may venture to say that it is fidelity to these emotions that makes the connexion between the four movements of the Symphony singularly close.

This will probably make the work to many ears tedious, for in the passage from the prelude of the opening movement to the apotheosis or final epilogue the change of emotion is so gradual, so faithful to its melody, and so dimly discernible in the end, that the impatient listener is hardly likely to see any progress whatever, and, as heard to-day, the Symphony hardly gives the impression of a composer greatly practised in orchestral writing; but it might be unfair to the composer to take for granted that his balance of instruments

is as yet present in anything like the most perfect way. We thought there was some tendency to let the secondary motives obscure the greater ideas. The idyllic motives are indeed so continually in evidence and so beautifully intermingled that they are apt to take the attention from the broader surge of the main motive, which uprises, as it were, from below, while they float and hover in the air above.

It has been said of Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony that it is the work of a town dweller taking only a short respite in the country. Without suggesting any comparison in the mastery of the two works, it may be said with surety that the emotions of the new work are those of a man whose heart and soul are in the country and in country life. The difficulty for the town listener is that they are so much so and that they have so much of the countryman's naivety in the tempo. The Symphony has also a general slowness and an absence of greatly arresting features. One might as well look almost for an instantaneous change in the weather as for an arresting contrast in this music. The scherzo, if it is not undevout to speak of the third movement by this title, has a little more bite and vim than the rest. One suspects here some emulation of Brahms's methods.

The main idea is presented in two rhythmic forms by the divided orchestra, and in its vigour and tonality reminds one a little of the opening song from the Wenlock Edge song-cycle. It begins at a moderate tempo, but a more animated alternative section follows, and the coda is the presto movement of a real country dance. This third movement is the only descent into the bustle of the world. The composer recalls himself and his high moods for the finale, which, in its relation to the first two movements, has hardly any separate identity.

One wonders, however, whether to the normal or the casual ear the persistence of subject-matter will be recognizable in any other way than by its monotony. Has the composer achieved or allowed a sufficient plasticity of melody to carry his poetic transition of mood home to the hearts of his hearers? He has trusted a noble-sounding harmony, whose movement hardly interests in itself but

is the medium of almost static emotion, to bear forward a vague burden of melody whose commingling often seems more like something we must accept as a tolerable result of accident than something in itself deliberate and beautiful. One may count as fortunate here those few listeners who have been able to digest the work during its preparation and have not been left to the chance impressions of a single performance.

Whatever may be thought about the work in its relation to the great masterpieces of music, there is no doubt that in its relation to English music it must remain among the masterpieces of the time. It may be dull but it is not dead, and though in his technique and calculations of effect the composer may be guilty of many ineptitudes, there is in the music what is worthy of our reverence and our love.

## *STANFORD*

STANFORD, Parry, and Mackenzie have been regarded as the redeemers of English music from the slough of Victorian indifference, and though Sullivan as a composer is not less eminent and far more generally loved, he has never been reckoned, like them, as standing for the renaissance of British music. Sullivan was, indeed, thought to have taken the downward path in the series of Gilbertian operas which now seem certain to perpetuate his fame. This separation of Sullivan in the public mind illustrates the general tendency of that time to look first of all for a moral inspiration or striving in the arts themselves before even the facility for an art which betokens genius. Sir Villiers Stanford had, like Sullivan, the Hibernian vein of humour well marked in him, yet he maintained always the serious aspiration which makes the arts an apostleship more than a profession, and he is thought of first in that light. Stanford, Parry, and Mackenzie have been identified also with the more complete establishment of our collegiate life in music, and though the first result of that establishment is to reveal the fact that, while we now have academies and musicians in plenty, we

have still no fully organized musical life, the step forward is one of great importance. It is for the younger generation to find the army of young musicians a useful livelihood.

Stanford is also notable as our first musician to take the promulgation and arrangement of folk-song seriously. It is the fashion now to decry his work in this field as not strictly in its kind or considerate enough of the modal origins and associations of folk-melody. Yet his own genius derives largely from this kind, and his work in it has always the touch of personal genius. He also set the fashion for a complete pianoforte technique in the accompaniment of folk-song, and though this fashion has led to great abuses in less skilful hands, Stanford himself has written many arrangements which make the songs themselves more worthy of our love. In its general character, indeed, his music has a warm and lovable nature. His Irish compatriots cannot do less than love him for what he has done to make Irish music beloved. Nor can English music-lovers do less than love the composer of the 'Sea Songs', which are in every singer's repertory, and the music of which has probably done more to make the ballads of Newbolt known and valued than the poetry would have done for itself.

That Stanford allowed himself frequently concessions to the secondary type of writing which seeks to acquire rather than to impose a style cannot be denied. This weakness also showed itself increasingly as he aged. His opera 'The Critic', which was very finely presented by Sir Thomas Beecham and became something very near to an established success, had, with all its genius and skill, too little of adventure in its technique to escape the charge of a hardened conservatism. After Stanford, Parry, Mackenzie, and the rest of their academical kind had rejuvenated British music by their splendid endeavours, Elgar touched the fabric that was trembling into life with a more distinct and vital genius, and instead of British music becoming just learned and serious it became free. If it has become not a little anarchic in that freedom, it still wears and is likely to wear much of the learning and strength for which Stanford so nobly fought and for which all his music very capably stands.

## *WEBER, JUNE* 1926

THE centenary of Weber's death has come round when the immediate use and culture of Weber's music have almost dwindled away to nothing. It is doubtful whether the occasion itself will give rise to the slightest natural or genuine enthusiasm. This is not to say that Weber and the music of Weber are done with. But it may be said of him more surely than of any other composer in the first rank that he died too soon. There was a completion about the work of Mozart, and even about that of Schubert, who died earlier. But Weber had as definite ideas as Wagner upon what he intended to do for dramatic music. It was Kind, the librettist of 'Der Freischütz', and not Wagner, who formulated the doctrine about the union of the arts in dramatic music. The contemporaries of Weber charged him with the banality of writing music avowedly for the masses. He was, if not by base intention, yet by the blessing of nature, exceedingly successful in his appeal to the populace. Readers of Heine will remember how he tells that he was once so persecuted by the popularity of a melody from 'Der Freischütz' that, after having fled from one place to another to get out of its way, he took refuge in a droshky, only to find the driver went on whistling it insistently.

The truth is that Weber, in an entirely pious way, had attempted to express in his music the folk-feeling of the German people. This he had so felicitously combined with the expression of his own nature that no one could separate the one thing from the other. And the personal traits of Weber's music were of a unique kind. No one before him had such a wild-springing yet natural melody. No one had endowed music with so much colour, had been able to paint a picture so instantaneously, or to give to the picture so much of magic, rapture, and life. His imagination dwelt in a land, as Wagner said, half-way between the theatre and fairyland. No one before him, or even since him, has been able to endow the ornamentation of music with so much natural emphasis and life. But while 'Der Freischütz' had all these virtues, it was not in itself sufficient for the composer's aims and genius, and Weber, who was less strong than Wagner in the critical and poetic side of dramatic genius, fell a victim, in his later works, to the feebleness of the libret-

tist. As Goethe says, this want of critical power must be reckoned a defect, for genius should know how to guard itself against such vain labour. And if Weber was unable, in his too short span of life, to redeem his work from this failure on the dramatic side, another, a stronger than he, was to come, in Richard Wagner, who would make so wholesale a pillage of his musical virtues that men would almost forget to whom they originally belonged. A Frenchman may criticize Weber, and an Englishman may admire him, but only a German can love him, said Wagner, in his oration by Weber's final grave at Dresden. It was a very incomplete acknowledgement of his own vast indebtedness to his forerunner.

## *THE BICENTENARY OF GLUCK, JULY* 2, 1914

TO-DAY is the bicentenary of Gluck's birth. It seems likely to be honoured by but few performances of his works, and our musical life proves incapable, even for the time, of rising to the austere delights of Gluck's music. His reputation as a force in the history of music has nevertheless been strengthened by Wagner, who, born almost precisely a century after him, has done more than all other men put together to carry his work towards completion. In the hands of Wagner and Strauss music has become capable of a vast dramatic rhapsody, but not even in the deaths of Isolde and Tristan or Siegfried and Brynhilde does it achieve the concentration that marks the true culmination of dramatic tragedy. Gluck also curiously failed to end his operas on the tragic note, however greatly he was inspired by tragic imagination during their course. Music has in the very coil of its harmonic strands an eternal cadence of tragic import, but its reflections tend more to an expansion of the imagination than to the concentration of dramatic intensity which drama alone can convey. Gluck seems likely to remain, in the practical sense, one of those unfortunates who, like Liszt and Berlioz, are in the front rank without securing a fitting popular fame. As a pioneer he was more modern probably than he knew. His was one of the heads which, like that of his argumenta-

tive acquaintance Rousseau, contained the seeds of the post-Revolutionary romance. In his music it breaks forth in fragmentary gleams of supreme passion and supreme beauty. One might indeed almost call him a splendidly fragmentary musician. So far as he deals in complete forms, they are chiefly the short forms of single ideas which make a passing or instantaneous rather than a developed impression. But his music, at its best, possesses in a most rare degree the largeness and plasticity which mark the highest forms of beauty. It gives, therefore, in a fugitive way, the suggestion of greatness and chastity of form which we recognize as the attributes of the noblest art. This greatness Gluck no doubt owes chiefly to his loving study of human nature, which made his life one long struggle to portray the emotions of the human heart with justice and power, and distinguished his music above that of all others by its fineness of imagination.

## *THE PASTORAL SYMPHONY OF BEETHOVEN, MARCH* 1924

It is twelve years since the 'Pastoral' Symphony of Beethoven was last given at the Hallé Concerts, and while there was a feeling of great satisfaction at hearing it once more, it received, we venture to think, a new-fashioned reading which gave it a rather old-fashioned effect. Beethoven's warning, that it should be more emotional than picturesque, avails little against the young modern player who has been used to being picturesque before everything in his music for the whole of his life. And so far as Beethoven is picturesque it is not in the modern manner. His 'Pastoral' Symphony, when it is sharpened to the picturesque, does not become a scene with modern atmosphere, or *Stimmung* as the Germans would call it. Beethoven here goes rather back to the picturesque of Haydn's 'Creation' than forward to the tone-painting of a Delius. Beethoven's real feeling in this symphony is such as leads on to the nature worship of a Vaughan Williams. But he imparts his solemnity in such a subtle and personal way that the surface meaning of the music is hardly touched by it, and that surface meaning is the

naïve and bright simplicity of pastoral feeling which was so large a part of Haydn's nature, and so large a part of poetry in the Haydn and Beethoven time. Hence it comes about that Beethoven is not made modern by the modern touch of picturesque in his music. We have found always what we take to be the true interpretation of his 'Pastoral' Symphony to be rather dull, or at least somnolent, with a grandeur sleeping about it all. The capricious figure of the opening movement, which is so insistent, loses this greatness when it becomes too active, and from being sleepy becomes a little tiresome. The last movement should grow a little cosmic in its suggestion, as we know by the fact that Saint-Saëns felt inspired by it when composing 'The Deluge'. Yet this music seems as little removed from Rossini as the earlier part of the symphony is from Haydn. The scherzo abounded in the pictoral character last night, and was in that sense handled with perfect genius. But the slow movement is, after all, the most beautiful part of the symphony, and it was the least disturbed in its beauty by last night's reading. It at least flowed along without any skipping or capricious prancing. A long and lovely chain of music, it neither hung heavily nor seemed hurried away. We did not feel, even with the whole symphony, that the conductor was in the personal sense responsible for the loss of somnolence and ideality. Something rather in the very cleverness and clarity of the playing made the difference. But the slow movement was itself master of the players. Satisfaction with it meant to the refreshened listener satisfaction with the whole.

## *BRAHMS, THE FIRST SYMPHONY, OCTOBER* 16, 1924

THE choice of Brahms's First Symphony to open the winter's symphonies seems to put forward a claim for the composer as the supreme symphonist, if not in the quantity and range of his symphonies, yet in their quality as the musician views them. Sir Hamilton Harty has had an extraordinary success in the interpretation of these works, so far as he has gone, and a rightful pride in this

achievement may, of course, have had something to do with the preference shown for the composer. It is more possible, perhaps, to impart a full vitality to works which are, in their period, reasonably near to ourselves than to works for whose interpretation the historic sense must be brought into play. Musicians, we think, as a whole have reached a time when the playing of Brahms gives them possibly the highest pleasure their art can afford. There has always been more contention about the actual quality of the First Symphony than about the rest. It is in bulk the biggest of the four, and was clearly a greater effort than the others to the composer himself. It is a greater effort also to his interpreters, and to put life into the whole of its vast bulk is probably the greatest undertaking that any conductor and orchestra can attempt.

Brahms, in his music, and especially in his C minor Symphony, brings back music to the moral heights on which it had lived with Bach and Beethoven, but from which the later romantic movement had withdrawn it. The process of modernization in music has been almost wholly one of taking up the phases of secular life and of putting lyrical poetic feeling into music. Brahms did not lose this gift, but he restored also the heroic moral tone, which is a part of classicism in music. But Brahms, like Goethe, and unlike the poets and composers with whom piety is a culture and a sentiment, never allows a moral sentiment to blind him to the truth, nor is he willing to plant his faith in the clouds or in anything that he merely wishes to be true. He is simple in aesthetic, and his faith is childlike in that sense; but in every other sense he is a man. If we remember his 'Song of Destiny' we shall remember a tremendous picture at its close where, in music that speaks louder than the words, his notes snap off and leave us with nothing but the sight of man falling from cliff to cliff into the abyss. The many terrible plucked notes which we hear from time to time in the C minor Symphony have one and all no less portentous a meaning. The symphony, like the novel, and most other works of art on any great scale, must present us with a complete view of life and whatever conception of its before and after the artist may command.

The opening movement of the C minor Symphony pictures to us

man's striving—his vast attempts, his sudden falls, the abyss continually beneath him, the strong faith, the great heart, and the sublime terror of it all. The movement has been thought, for these reasons, in itself ineffectual. If it is so, it is only as life must be ineffectual. The second movement begins with a phrase of melody worthy and sweet enough to be wafted over Weber's grave. And surely if a half-close of music ever died in the heart with ineffable sweetness, it is the second phrase, whose minor third of the key the composer presses against his heart, like the nightingale presses the thorn. Then the aspiring melody of the first dominant section—with what simplicity and directness it rises! If the first movement is a striving with fate, the second is surely a blessed reconcilement to it. The tender allegretto which does duty as scherzo has no more than the effect of a delicious intermezzo, its singleness of idea making it no more than an aside in the progress of the work. The last movement has the most wonderful introduction to be found in music. One of the most imperishable things of a lifetime is to have heard this introduction at the hands of Nikisch with his own orchestra at Leipzig. The plucked notes of this introduction we remember as the most vividly tragic impression of music ever heard. But there is more than tragedy in the sequel. The march music which follows has among its many fine ingredients the pilgrim note of 'Tannhäuser', but combined with a note of triumph which 'Tannhäuser' does not know.

## *THE MASTERSINGERS, MARCH* 1926

THE National Opera Company are on this visit giving us but few great masterpieces, and 'The Mastersingers' of Wagner stands quite alone for importance among the works to be performed. 'The Mastersingers' has proved its value both on the score of popularity and of art, for even in the unfortunate autumn season it attracted one of the few great audiences, and this time there was an absolutely solid house. When, on founding the Beecham Opera, Sir Thomas Beecham determined to include one of Wagner's greatest works, even in his war repertory, he hesitated very much between 'The Mastersingers' and 'Tristan and Isolde',

deciding for 'Tristan' in the end, and he thus provided the greatest of all opportunities for Miss Buckman and Mr. Mullings, who have each made their greatest fame in this work. Sir Thomas did not regret his choice, though he cast many a longing eye on 'The Mastersingers' before it became a part of the Beecham Opera Company's repertory. Now, it is to be feared, 'Tristan' is out of favour, yet it remains the first of all music dramas, and a work which the National Opera Company cannot afford to neglect, but must perform, even in the face of fortune. 'The Mastersingers' has no great dramatic importance. Dramatically it is merely an example of art dining off its own head, and a terrible warning against the impropriety of the dramatic artist talking shop. But 'The Mastersingers' is also the sublime example of the humour which music alone can paint. The fount of this humour is love. The masters of the eighteenth century were aesthetically somewhat lethargic in music, as in other things. But they were essentially right when, with Handel at their head, they made music the sublimation of human love. The symphonic period was built upon this supposition; and when Wagner, mellowed and matured with the throes of musical passion, turned in 'The Mastersingers' once more to this theme, he treated it with a humour and benignity which had never before been heard to breathe such divine accord. When Handel, in his sublime moods, dissolved his hearers into ecstasies, he was said to bring all heaven before their eyes. Wagner, in 'The Mastersingers', with a rarer and more all-embracing sublimity, finds it sufficient to reconcile man with man. When the tones of the divine quintet from 'The Mastersingers' melt and die upon the ear, that in essence is what they effect. The true hearer, in listening, is reconciled to his kind. And in this reconciliation is effected equally the opposite miracle of 'Tristan', the reconciliation with death. Music is an art of cadence, and however bravely, as in the Overture of 'The Mastersingers', the banner of tone may be opened out, the cadence and the fall of music must come, and the most humane and loving tones of music at last must fall upon the air. But that they may die as the sheer ripeness of a reconciled humour, from which every essence of sourness has been strained,

and of which nothing but the purest love of one's human kind remains, is a lesson more thoroughly to be learned by hearing an ideal performance of 'The Mastersingers' than by anything else that the arts have given us.

## *STRAUSS'S 'AUS ITALIEN', HALLÉ CONCERT, JANUARY 1914*

THAT such a fine work should have waited for over a quarter of a century for its first performance here is another illustration of the lack of enterprise in musical management generally. What visions it would have opened if given within any reasonable period of the date of its composition. To-day, viewed from the greater heights of Strauss's later works, it is just a fresh and glowing piece of music, full of a life with which we are quite familiar, and highly interesting as a revelation of the composer's manner of development. Its programme, which is of Strauss's own devising, and the incidental poetic ideas, which are quite easy to read into its scheme, are a singular proof that the composer's imagination is not of a crude, realistic nature, as his enemies will have it. We find him, on the contrary, occupied with ideas and moods far removed from the actual scenes before him, and only derived from them by a finely poetic process of reflection. His mind turns back on the glories of the past with the affection of the most ardent romanticist; and although he is not dead to the present, but has a most lively sense of it, the blending of present beauty and life with romantic musing on the past is of a highly subtle and poetic nature. The great development of Strauss's originality in this particular work is a striking witness to the musical fertility of such definite poetic thought. No wonder that Strauss came to believe that even a music-stool could be contemplated as a source of inspiration for programme music of a poetic kind. There is the true classic repose in the opening movement, 'On the Campagna', and the contemplation of the spacious scene already brings something of the extended harmonic diapason which in Strauss's music later becomes such a remarkable feature. The movement is introductory in style also, and in its grandeur it

anticipates in some degree the subject-matter of the second and main movement, 'Amid the Ruins of Rome', whose sub-title, 'Fantastic pictures of vanished glory: feelings of sadness and sorrow, amid the sunny present', already shows the subtlety of intermixed poetic thought. In the slower movement, 'By Sorrento's Strand', the delicacy is seen in the treatment of the realistic suggestion itself, and a tinge of severity is added by the derived and reflective ideas. In the lively last movement, 'Scenes of popular life in Naples', the rogue Strauss, as we have learned to know him in 'Till Eulenspiegel', is seen plainly at work. The folk-song faddists will never forgive Strauss for mistaking Denza's song for a popular Neapolitan folk-tune and including it here. But he makes it serve his purpose well, and we need not be too squeamish about our ideas of Italian popular music.

## *STRAUSS'S 'ALPINE' SYMPHONY, NOVEMBER* 1923

In this work Strauss may be said to show his nearest approach to Gustav Mahler and Bruckner, whose music has gradually come in Germany to a more general use and whose naïve exposition of nature has proved rather a stumbling-block to English music-lovers. Mahler, as is generally known, was not unwilling to have himself considered as one who had gone up into the mountains alone, and had withdrawn himself from his disciples to live musically in the more rarefied atmosphere of the heights. He drew not a little of pathos and of beauty to his music from this figure of himself, and in its light his later works are seen to be very much one work, in which the pathos of a gradual withdrawal from life can be clearly read.

Strauss, it may be, had something of the same feeling, or was emulous of it, when he took up the subject of the 'Alpine' Symphony. But he is musically very much more a man of the world than Mahler ever knew how to be, and perhaps no great composer has ever been less aloof from or more clearly understood by the world in general. The 'Alpine' Symphony will bring no mysteries to his admirers, and if it has a fault that may be attributed to it even

without a hearing, it is that so little of mystery, either in the musical or poetic sense, attaches to it. The work might indeed be chosen to illustrate the view, sometimes accepted with regard to vocal music, that its poetic associations should not be too high or recondite in their character. Some jest has been made of the Symphony by comparing its programme to that of a personally conducted tour; but a more just estimate will be to regard it as yet another of the life visions which we find are generally the true basis of the symphonic poem. German poetry and German song, in fact, provide already a noble exemplar for this programme in the poem of Goethe, 'An Schwager Kronos', which is set to such wonderful music by Schubert. Love as a theme, it is true, plays no part in Strauss's poem; but the descent and epilogue are no mere ending of a day, but a vision of life's close such as Goethe makes his picture of them. In the theme of the 'Ascent', which is the dominating theme of the work, we find just one of those lively Straussian themes which have done duty for 'Till Eulenspiegel', 'Don Juan', and the rest of Strauss's heroes. The theme of the 'Rocks' into which it is hardened is one more characteristic of Mahler, whose hero appears always as sternly beset and rather hewing his way through the world or lifting himself with difficulty above it. In the 'Entry to the Wood' we find for the first time a true lyrical element in the secondary sense. This element loosens itself out into flowing semiquavers for the section entitled 'Wandering by the Brook', which culminates without any radical change in the section 'At the Waterfall', in the iridescent texture of which appears a delicate wood-wind melody or 'Apparition'. The section 'O'er Flowery Meadows' will naturally bring expectations of the last act of 'Parsifal', and the light lilt of the upspringing melody will not altogether disappoint them. This is a case where a too strict originality would have been churlish and unjust to music itself. Further sections, 'On the Alm,' 'Through thickets and brushwood into error', and 'On the Glacier' and 'A Dangerous Moment', lead on through broken ways till the vibrating strings and open harmonies proclaim the 'Summit'. An oboe solo, alternating with long-breathing harmonies of wood-wind melody, leads to a bold assertion of the personal theme

on the brass, and wide-stretching arms of melody complete the note of triumph and bring on an ecstatic section entitled 'Vision'. An obvious but, one may well say, unavoidable sort of inversion introduces the idea of descent. Mists and gradual darkness bring us to a section or epilogue entitled 'Elegy', which leads through stillness on to a storm section, and then through a rapid descent to the 'Setting of the Sun' and 'Ausklang' or 'Dissolution' to the 'Night' in which the poem began.

A marvellous consistency of thematic material is maintained throughout and the poetic suggestion of the transforming themes is musically inexhaustible. An immense orchestra is demanded by the work, whether one reads the requirements in a strict or a free sense.

## *STRAUSS'S 'ALPINE' SYMPHONY, HALLÉ CONCERT, NOVEMBER* 15, 1923

THE performance of Strauss's 'Alpine' Symphony left the impression—which a general knowledge of Strauss and a reading of the score would give—that for its subject the expression is too open and too little mystical to satisfy an exalted view. The subject, as Strauss conceives it, is, indeed, less suitable than some others he has previously chosen to bring out the most exalted and the more mystic traits of his own nature. The Symphony is a long and gorgeous weft of sound. It has been objected that the themes of the Symphony are not great or strikingly original in themselves. It must be remembered that the work, though long, is not so long as the 'Nibelungen Ring', and the fact that it has to be written in short stretches makes it impossible to assert the themes with the deliberation that Wagner in the 'Ring' employs with such sublime power. The themes must also be adaptable for rapid allusion and a perceptible transformation to the style of the various sections without destroying or forcing their identity too absolutely. If we may apply for once an overridden German definition, we may say that in this symphonic poem the hero is regarded subjectively as under the

influence of circumstance at least as much as master of it, and not mainly as struggling with it or conquering it. The climber, if, as we probably should, we regard him as personally represented in the main theme, is to be looked upon as first of all receptive to his experience. This view gives a certain mildness to all the glory and extravagance of the themes, their treatment, and even to their orchestration. We see Strauss passed through his most strenuous stage and entering in some degree the second romantic stage of life, as we find it, say, in the later works of Shakespeare. Strauss does not, as does Shakespeare in the works of this period, unlock his most precious veins of poetry. That is where we may justly feel a little disappointment in the work. He gives us just his open self, presented with a ravishing sonorousness and every refinement of musical culture. Especially does he give us the culture of the perfected orchestral writer. In no other work does he show us such masterly effects of contrary orchestral motion. This feat is a modern adaptation of the old contrapuntal part-writing in which effects of bold and continuous contrary motion were considered the highest and most powerful manifestations of art. It will be the general opinion, we think, that the running theme which represents at its introduction the course of the brook or mountain stream is, in its development and gradual culmination through the woodland scene to the iridescence of the waterfall, the finest stretch of the music. Possibly familiarity will enable both players and listeners to find a more golden and harmonious fullness in the brave clashing of the brass instruments. But an audience now is not doubtful of its enjoyment in Strauss, and in Sir Hamilton Harty's masterly handling of what is to English ears a wholly new work the Manchester audience could last night find a fullness of musical delight which it cannot have experienced in a new work for some years.

## *CÉSAR FRANCK, DECEMBER* 1922

THE common knowledge of César Franck and his music has grown up so recently, and is so much a part of our present day, that we can hardly think of him as having walked the world with

Beethoven and Schubert, or with having entered it hard on the heels of Wagner, Liszt, Mendelssohn, and Schumann, and about the same period of a decade in front of Brahms. Grove's *Dictionary*, when first published in 1879, contained no word about him, though he had then reached the age of 57, at which Beethoven died, and was within eleven years of his death, which came in November 1890. The birth centenary of César Franck finds him with a reputation unusually green for so great a man, for the great rarely escape some general recognition during their life if it is of normal span. Franck had scarcely earned an official fame even in Paris, where he had spent the whole of his active life, when its end, and that almost a ripe end, had come. In this self-effacement, as in most other things, he was the antithesis of Wagner, who carried to the most extreme lengths the dependence rights of the artist, and as a man became, perhaps unjustly, as little admired by the many as Franck was greatly loved and admired by the few. For the lesson of Franck's life is that for the artist a self-denying and self-effacing virtue may be carried too far, and the work of genius be endangered by the labour of goodness. The harvest of Franck's life is peculiarly the harvest of goodness, and though it is a rich harvest, whose value and store are not easily to be calculated, yet it is a harvest that differs widely from what is usually expected from creative genius. That difference is due, not to circumstances, but to Franck's personal character.

He began life with a fair hand, for his father was determined, even before himself, that he should become a star of the musical firmament, and did all in his power to make a musical career possible to him. Born at Liége, in Belgium, where the German and French forces were doomed later to meet in a world-embracing conflict, Franck showed the tenacity and strength of the Walloon stock, and, with the solidity of a musical nature not without kinship to that of Beethoven, he became by his adherence to French culture the veritable father of the modern French school. He has become a greater force outside of his own music than in it, for the leaders of the younger French school were one and all his pupils, and it is as the hero and tutor of genius, even more than as the man

of genius, that his fame will be preserved. He came from a family associated with painting more than with music, having something of the primitive in its nature, and he was evidently ill-fitted by character for the career of pianoforte virtuoso which was planned for him. His bent towards polyphony and the intellectual aspects of music was shown when, at the Conservatoire in Paris, at a sight-reading contest, he chose also to transpose the elaborate sight test as he read it, and in an improvisation contest, being given subjects for fugal and for sonata exposition, he had the audacity to combine the two tasks. He himself had so little permanent interest in the pianoforte show-pieces which he wrote for his proposed pianistic career that they passed out of the number of his permanent works, and he is now known almost entirely by music written after he was fifty years of age.

His severe ideals might not have compromised his personal prospects so much had he not asserted also his pride as a man by a marriage against the wishes of his father and thus thrown himself early, having given this hostage to fortune, on his own professional resources and labours. Doomed by these facts and his modesty and rectitude of professional temperament to give some ten lessons daily during the main part of his life, he emerged only from this self-imposed obscurity in his later years to write some few great works, to form a band of devoted students having fortunately a rich endowment of genius, to find his fame as an organist and improvisator unsurpassed, and to be acknowledged by the few who were capable enough and young enough to know as the first musician in France.

The organ is written large over all César Franck's work as a musician, and after a short period as organist of Notre Dame de Lorette he became organist of St. Clotilde, where he remained till his death, being made also Organ Professor at the Conservatoire in his last years. His habit, it is said, was to begin work at 5.30 a.m., and his compositions were mainly written in the first two hours, which were all he reserved for himself of his working day. His chief choral work, 'The Beatitudes', occupied him for ten years, and no complete performance of it was given until three years after his death,

when an adequate performance established his greatness finally. He is, more than any other composer, associated with the endeavour to make the symphonic or sonata form enlarge itself to a greater unity by elements which definitely connect the various movements together. This endeavour, as it involves to some degree the metamorphosis of themes which is the stock-in-trade of the programme symphonist, links in a degree the ideals of the symphony and the symphonic poem in one. In some of his works, as in the well-known Violin and Pianoforte Sonata, his aims seem to bear the impress of Beethoven's Choral Symphony, in which the various themes are mingled and handled in a broken or recitative manner, so that their strength may converge to a whole. His String Quartet, which is the most massive work of this kind in existence, shows unmistakably a stimulation from the great C sharp minor Quartet of Beethoven, but Franck here, more than Beethoven, seeks to carry a choral polyphony by means of instruments to a Gothic architectural height. A kindred and more powerful effect in this direction is found in his symphony. In these ways he shows not only the influence of the organ on his musical thought, but the influence of the cathedral architecture with its Gothic and romantic grotesque. Franck by this way belongs to the romantic composers, and shows a closer touch with the medieval and Gothic romance than any composer since Bach. His counterpoint is not so completely vocal in its spring as that of Bach, but shows often a strong wave-like motion, massive as the motion of the sea is massive, and romantic in its suggestion of infinitude. His connexion with the most modern of French writers is chiefly in the inspiration his great bell-like harmonies have for the experimental modern harmonist. The latest French school is perhaps too far picturesque, extra-musical, or unmusical in its critical attitude, and more given to precision than musical fullness in its workmanship. It does not gain its faults from Franck. But his discovery that bell sounds might strike in almost anywhere with profound effect, and that in music as in nature itself distance had an almost infinite harmonizing power, is the great source of their strength. Franck has a poetic strength which associates him with every experience, from the ancient

Gothic romance of our cathedrals to the veriest naturalism of yesterday, and all the elemental aspects of nature. Through all these things the music of Franck must have an enduring influence.

César Franck not only endowed his whole musical life with a Christian benignity, but he sought, not without success, and not only in his music to 'The Beatitudes', to give something of this expression to his music. Some of his followers, as notably Mr. Vincent d'Indy, have curiously endeavoured to carry the method of moral and Christian symbolism into their systems of musical education.

## *THE CÉSAR FRANCK SYMPHONY, JANUARY* 14, 1926

CÉSAR FRANCK's one symphony did not, during its course at the Hallé Concert, stir up more than a slight and diffident applause, but at its close there was a long-continued and enthusiastic demonstration. It is becoming the normal thing that the symphony shall be acknowledged in this way as the main musical feature of the concert, and it is the best sign possible both for the reputation of the orchestra and the judgement of the public. We do not remember a symphony performance which seemed more of a conductor's performance than that of last night, for it was an interpretation which would have been impossible without the conductor's control, support, and inspiration in every bar of its long course. The César Franck Symphony is emphatically one that has to be made. It is a work quite unique in style. Few, we think, would say for it that it has the natural or ideal texture for an orchestral symphony. If in this matter Franck is right, then Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Brahms were manifestly wrong. But while few will think its texture the best possible, almost every one now has come to think it admirable in its way and according to its type. It demands of the players and the conductor a resolute power of exaltation and climax. The César Franck Symphony is now well known by the orchestra, and the players, who must feel greatly also

the need of a conductor's help in its climaxes, are alert and malleable to their conductor's mind. No other symphony known to our public is so weighty. It is generally regarded as a 'faith' symphony. One may say the same, in a sense, of all those many great works of music which arrive at a feeling of satisfaction within themselves, and which, for the want of other programme, are regarded chiefly for their moral tone. Yet music probably has no other work in which this problem of moral philosophy is so plainly, persistently, and laboriously set forth. We have said that its texture is heavy, and it seems also true that it is chosen more for purpose than delight. If we dislike a too obviously moral and purposeful work we may well dislike this one. If we like it we must be well reconciled to the dominance of moral purpose in music. The serpent lifts its head, one may say, in the very opening bar. It continues to rear it through a great part of the symphony. Yet the very ascent turns what is ominous to a note of triumph, and the second motive of the symphony is also a contrasting and consoling note of hope. The wind instruments play a quite unwonted part in the work, and from their slow lungs the note of hope rises through long and lowly ways, though in short and submerged phrases, to its final assertion of a *credo*, or faith.

It is with feelings of relief that we hear the delicate harp chords and plucked strings which open the middle movement. Here one is instantly reminded of a late violin sonata by Schumann. Both chords and the cor anglais melody, which soon accompanies them, seem lightly flung on the air, and one is rid, for a time at least, of a too plain purpose in life. Even in this movement the composer reminds one of Elgar in a power to conceive light and beautifully woven melodies which, except in their suggestion that delight is fugitive, seem absolutely free from the heaviness of a moral bearing. Yet Franck, like Elgar, will be at his moral task again, and in the last movement, though he recurs to these light airs, he is both determined and triumphant in it.

## *MOZART. A NOTE.* 1926

THE inexhaustibility of Mozart must ever give cause for wonderment to the modern musicians. That there ever was a time when just to write music was enough for the composer, and when the composer was so compact of music that he might seemingly write on to the end of life without exhausting himself or his art with a uniform ease and perfection of utterance that make his music more like the work of nature than of art, has become to the modern mind such a far-off thing that the music of Mozart is to us a garden of enchantment owning no relationship to the world that is. We can no longer think of our music as a thing in itself; we need some elucidation for it; something to bind it to earth and link it with the matter of fact which we call poetry, though poetry usually forms the least part of those associations to which our modern music is tied. How many symphonic poems, as we call them, could be furnished, musically, out of the heavenly 'Divertimento' for strings and horns, whose six movements beguiled the best part of an hour away at the Noon Concert! It is the seventeenth of its kind written in the short life of the composer, and is so much of a piece with its kin that the musician hardly bothers to ask more about it than about the glass of water that he would drink. Each is as unquestionably a fact of nature, and though the Mozart music has no being or birth or parallel of any kind except in man's thought, its being has the same ideality and finality as the simplest things of nature. The making of music by a Mozart has been likened to the instinctive spinning of the spider's web. The flaw in the comparison is that the Mozartean spider was such a unique insect. It had but one forbear, and that a clumsy one; and but one sublime follower, and that one more clumsy still. The lightness of Mozart, the quality which makes his music tread on air, belongs to him alone. Everybody is supposed to know all about the spinning; but none can spin like him. And this lightness is what makes an hour of Mozart, such as we enjoyed from the small group of Hallé players under Sir Hamilton Harty, something which no other composer could give us. The playing was exquisite; that must be taken for granted in Mozart, for without exquisite playing we do not begin to hear Mozart as he is. But the player who does

not become a finer creature when he is faced with Mozart's music is, so to speak, no musician at all. For we come back to that in the end. Other men compose music; Mozart is music. In his hands music is not constrained to any purpose beyond itself. With him we may live in a blissful state whose very solemnity is only a new flooding of beauty which comes sudden from heaven, and is as free of bitterness as its most blissful joy. The audience yesterday had a goodly proportion of men. It was an audience that knew what it came for and did not go away unsatisfied.

## *HOLST'S 'AT THE BOAR'S HEAD'*

THE text of the Falstaffian opera by Gustav Holst is taken almost entirely from the tavern scenes of Shakespeare's 'Henry IV', with the addition of two sonnets and the whole of the old ballad 'When Arthur first in court began', only two lines of which are sung by Falstaff in the play. The opera, which runs swiftly through in a single act, or interlude as the composer styles it, presents the Shakespearian text almost as rapidly as the spoken drama. The music, which seeks to present Shakespeare very much in the habit of his own time, is built mainly on airs from Playford's 'Dancing Master' and old ballads or country airs of the period, and from Cecil Sharp's collections. The two sonnets are set to original modal melodies of an antique mould. Holst, of course, in all these antique ways, being himself, cannot help being modern and original enough. The scene is laid in an upper room of Hostess Quickly's tavern in Eastcheap, but its most dramatic moment is when the procession and marching in preparation for the battle are seen and heard outside the window, in the street below. The dexterity with which the text is set to the old tunes, or against the old tunes heard in the orchestra, is a thing to marvel at, for there is no constraint, but a free speech which is also in a very genuine sense a free song, whether it is to the old airs themselves or to the original counterpoint, which has always been with Holst as a second nature.

In this work indeed Holst goes back, often goes back most charm-

ingly, to the manifold counterpoint which first made his fame. It enables him, in a most casual way, to let all his characters fall naturally into the dialogue, and drop out of it as in the most homely interchange of domestic speech. In this respect his dialogue has a musical lightness and dramatic propriety which the most expert of dramatic composers might envy, though the use of ancient airs as the main basis of the work may seem to argue a misgiving towards drama as the direct inspiration of music. Some dramatic impropriety may be felt in the venture of culling the humorous scenes only from a play in which they are so firmly grafted among scenes of serious action and high endeavour. It is for this reason, perhaps, that Holst wishes us to regard the work as a dramatic interlude rather than as a complete dramatic work. That it will prove pleasant enough in the playing we make no kind of doubt; and if we have not the serious action of the original play we have the serious reflections of the two sonnets put into the mouth of Prince Hal when he muses over his past life and turns his mind towards the high deeds which are now by circumstance to be demanded of him. The work may be as much a beautiful English pastoral as a drama in the strict sense of the term; that it is intensely English and also beautiful may be seen even from the vocal score. But we may be sure also that here the half is not told us, for with Holst always it is the use of the orchestra that is the miracle. He is in this use also something of a primitive, and uses both the utmost directness and the utmost economy.

## *HOLST'S 'THE PLANETS'*

'THE Planets' of Gustav Holst must leave the listener who goes to his music on any kind of aesthetic search not a little flabbergasted. The art of music takes, for its true enjoyment, a very fine intimacy and knowledge of the technical means employed in it. If we can only have a very rough experience of our means our ends are suspect. In one sense it would be quite wrong to take last night's performance of 'The Planets' as an end in itself. It is

the way with our modern orchestral music, especially in these post-war days, that it must be performed under conditions which forbid intimacy of feeling or understanding. The orchestral parts are borrowed for the shortest periods, and the best that can be hoped is that one performance furthers another, and after a while, if, on this rough experience, the music thrives and holds its own, it may become eventually known and understood. One may justly doubt, in the case of music so far erratic from normal standards as 'The Planets' of Holst, whether even the composer, any more than the public, can claim an adept knowledge. As to the tangibility of the poetic scheme of 'The Planets' as a sound basis for music we have misgivings, due no doubt in some degree to our incomplete knowledge. From this doubt we lend a very incomplete trust to the composer as we listen. When we find that he asks so much trust, that we must be ready to swallow so much that is dire in behalf of such an alloy of poetic ideas, our rebellion goes farther. Beauty once sat enthroned over all the arts. We have come almost to a time when she is never mentioned in connexion with them. Music has long been accepted as a fairly descriptive title for the art which passes under that name. It begins to hold good no longer. Can we think honestly that music has taught Holst all the art of 'The Planets'? Is he not finding, outside of music and outside honest poetic feelings and ideas, excuses, that are no more than excuses, for a great deal that is unbeautiful? There is much also that is beautiful in the work. If we make comparisons with other contemporary music we must come back to it, and rank it, in this comparison, high. But we admire with a devotion that is not entire, and with a sense of beauty flouted, nay, in a sense, insulted, by the musical and poetic methods of the work. We do not feel here, as in much modern music, that the harmonic feeling is too advanced for our immediate appreciation. Holst asks us to go back, not forward. He asks us to abandon our susceptibilities and to swallow an archaic harshness on the score of a poetic purpose which in itself rather repels than attracts us. In the name of music, and in the name of beauty, with all reverence for Holst, we confess our inability to succumb.

## *HOLST AS CONDUCTOR OF 'THE PLANETS', MARCH 4, 1922*

MR. GUSTAV HOLST had an enthusiastic reception on Saturday, not only from the public, but even more markedly from the members of the orchestra. The players also showed themselves very finely disposed towards the task of performing the three numbers from 'The Planets', which Mr. Holst came to conduct. One might feel fairly well satisfied at the close that most things which were essential had been got out of them. Mr. Holst himself handled the orchestra confidently, and seemed well satisfied with the performance. But while the music had this undoubted technical success, the performance did not reveal in it any unsuspected beauties, either in special veins of musical feeling or in poetic ideas of great value. The very completeness and authenticity of the performance go to strengthen our doubts whether the work itself adequately represents the art of music. We may grant that the opening movement more justly represents the dismay, barbarity, and horror of war than do the thousand and one marches of a military type which have been written. This merit of fidelity to an idea which has little connexion either with music or with beauty we had never questioned. The real question is whether the music creates this impression by means which are sufficiently musical and beautiful to give us any permanent satisfaction. Musicians have learned during recent years to appreciate that sound is in its essence composite, and to be less nice about the melodic and harmonic laws which regarded sounds as individual. They have learned also that there may be uses in the departure from what is in the strict sense musical. Still, there is a danger in characteristic or poetic ideas which are anti-musical, and Holst in this suite seems to be living on this dangerous ground. Can it be the spirit of music, one must ask, that has led Holst to the harshness and discordance of 'Mars'? If not, then its confidence of characterization is at best a dangerous virtue. We are well aware that the discordance is arrived at in a theoretical way, and is such discordance as musicians on occasion are disposed to forgive. But is it such discordance as the sensibility of a musician could by its nature conceive and delight in? We do not feel it to be that, nor yet to be such discordance as any modernity of the science of music in itself would

teach. It rather substitutes for such modernity an archaic limbo excused only by a want of sensibility. 'Saturn', the second of the two numbers given, has, again, a nobility stripped of beauty. 'Jupiter' has a merriment which lives only by making concessions to baldness and rudeness of style. It is an art which forces us upon the inartistic. We are not blind to the technical merit in the way it is done, but we are not satisfied that there is any necessity for an art so bluntly to forgo its own nature on the score of the natural in characterization. If we did not find Holst's poetic ideas in themselves suspect, we should feel more patience with him in following them; but in their falseness, it appears to us, lies the root of the whole trouble.

## *HOLST'S 'CHORAL' SYMPHONY, LEEDS*, 1925

THE Leeds Festival of 1925 will be remembered by one almost perfect accomplishment, and that one of great difficulty. The one work commissioned for the Festival was the Choral Symphony of Gustav Holst, and if ever a composer ought to be satisfied with having written a work for a special occasion Holst should be satisfied with the composition of this symphony. The poetry of Keats has had the happiest effect upon him. It has rarefied the quality of his imagination so that the note of poetic aspiration is never for a bar absent from the music. The spareness of harmony which this sense of poetic aspiration requires has tempered the discordant clash of his notes, and its presence so tempered the voices of the singers that they lost all the heaviness and deadness which so easily beset them, and so quickened the spirit of the music that it was felt to be alive in every note, even for an audience at the first hearing.

Although the symphony is choral as well as orchestral, it is so far instrumental in thought and design that it could almost be given without the voices. The scherzo, 'Ever let the fancy roam', was so far instrumental in its effect that the very voices had an instrumental effect, and the words, except as a guide to the listener,

were of but little use. This movement is, in fact, to be given at Birmingham next week by the instruments alone, but with the words printed as a guide for the audience. We do not mean that the singing of the movement was at all ineffectual. On the contrary, it was most perfectly done and was a marvel of rapid absolute intonation of notes kaleidoscopic in key.

Miss Dorothy Silk, as the soprano soloist of the invocation to Apollo, 'Spirit here that reignest', had an imperishable triumph. The music might have been written for her voice, and perhaps was. At any rate it is now identified with it. Most of the solo part is a chant with a beautiful rising cadence at the end of the phrase. To say she sang it in perfect tune is to state the case weakly; she sang it in perfect poetic tune. The composer has succeeded by spareness, and in these solos the absolute want of harmony is felt by no means as a want of poetic atmosphere; but when the solo voice ceases and the composer brings in his harmonies of quiet but boldly moving fourths, they sound indeed to be struck from Apollo's golden lyre. In the closing section, 'Bards of passion and of mirth', the burden of the poem is taken upon a surprisingly low key, but even here the composer's judgement seems not to have failed him, for a spiritual suggestion is obtained and the theme and poem as they mutually develop bring on a splendid climax and carillon of song.

The Invocation to Pan, with which the symphony opens, is sung on a shifting monotone with only an adumbration of music on the low accompanying instruments. The Song and Bacchanal which form the main movement open with a viola solo (which was beautifully played by Mr. Hobday), and the soprano voice enters, 'Beneath my palm trees, by the river's brim', with a tender willow song, or ballad, that sets the tone of voice for the final movement. The Bacchanal rhythms were perhaps the least effective part of the symphony. They sometimes seemed rather slow, and the men's voices in them rather dragging and heavy. One could fancy the movement having a finer effect. The slow movement to the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' was the most precarious thing for the composer to tackle. One felt he handled it as if he had the precious

vessel in his hands. One cannot speak of an adequate musical setting to such words; it is enough if they are touched without profanation, and at least the composer has been most reverent with them. He keeps a spirituality even in the picture of the procession to the sacrifice, and keeps, one feels, his natural impulses in a marvellous way. Perhaps in its effect the slow movement is the weakest, but as a work of poetic discretion in music it is the greatest triumph of the whole.

The audience for the first two movements of the work seemed to think a reverential attitude was most fitting. Later, after the scherzo, the outbreak of applause was spontaneous and irresistible, and at the close of the work the listeners did not know whether to applaud most the composer, or Miss Silk for the wonderful singing which had done so much to make the work clear, or Mr. Coates for his conducting. The orchestration of the work should not be forgotten, for it was not the least part of the composer's very difficult problem, and it was the part that was perhaps more cleverly solved than all the rest.

## *SCRIABIN: THE DIVINE POEM, HALLÉ CONCERT, MARCH 21, 1920*

THE Third Symphony, or 'Divine Poem', of Scriabin proved much easier for the listener than the 'Song of Ecstasy', given some little time ago. Mr. Albert Coates was conductor of both works, and in their introduction has rendered a great service both to the public and to the composer's music in this country. He has not only a genuine familiarity with the composer's style, but has also himself the broadly free and rhapsodic style which the music so manifestly demands. The orchestra was increased for Saturday's performance, and while it was in this increase vastly improved as a medium for such music, it was also apparent that a greater body of strings than we have ever had in Manchester is necessary to give the yeasty, oceanic spray of such all-embracing rhapsodic music. The 'Divine Poem' has not the hard brutalities of dissonance which

challenge our admiration or our sense of horror in 'The Poem of Ecstasy'. Nor has it the boldness of thematic beauty. As a whole its effects are soft and musical, and its harmonies are not more continuously dissonant and unresolved in their sequence than suffices for the post-Wagnerian rhapsodist. The moods of composers in this rhapsodic style are more consistent and more abiding than they perhaps know, for the subconscious plays a great part in them. An outsider who listens to the 'Divine Poem' will hardly be able to say with the conviction of Scriabin himself that the general theme is ever transformed so as to illustrate the gradation from human or earthly striving to the 'Jeu Divin'. The spirit of man, of music, or of melody will not be exorcized so easily, but remains something constant in its changes, and owes its strength to this very constancy. The main theme of the 'Divine Poem' is descended in type from the 'Amfortas' theme of Wagner, and though it does not seem within the range of Scriabin to make the theme ever so tragic in its expression as Wagner's theme, and though the design of triumphant striving everywhere swallows up the tragic expression, yet we may own the theme and its developments as worthy descendants of the great line. For the English ear the striking rhythmical suggestion of 'We won't go home till morning' in the theme as it is transformed to represent the 'Jeu Divin' will be apt to give an admixture of comic sanity to the appreciation. That Scriabin is, like Wagner, a sensuous writer out and out, appears in the poem from the composer's practical failure to make any real demarcation between the heroic and the sensuous elements of melody or of harmony. We do not say that any such demarcation needs to be made, or should be made, but if the unity of style is too great, the case of the preacher comes to naught. The original feature is the suggestion of spray which this sea of music so consistently gives. The performance was not a mere toiling one, but had a fine geniality, not often attained in a first performance, and for this good fortune we have perhaps to thank in a measure the performances at Liverpool and Bradford earlier in the week. But in any case the credit is due to Mr. Coates, who is so much at home in the work, and is manifestly so filled with it that it would be an irresponsive player indeed who did not

feel at home under him in the work. The work itself gives, as the 'Poem of Ecstasy' does not, the impression of youthfulness in the sense that the ideas are hardly conceived or handled for their full worth. That the poem is the work of a great genius is more clear than that it is in the final sense a great work.

## *SCRIABIN'S 'PROMETHEUS', LEEDS, OCTOBER* 1925

With Mr. Albert Coates as the main conductor it is natural that much of the music for the Festival should be on a large scale and developed on broad outlines. Curiosity about the music of Scriabin has died down a great deal since Mr. Coates gave the 'Prometheus' for the first time here three years ago. But he is here again, as enthusiastic an apostle of Scriabin as ever. He seemed to pull the last ounce of power out of the orchestra in giving the 'Divine Poem'; but while the sonority of the work and the beautiful playing of the solo violin and flute in the more ethereal developments of the poem were admired, the idea that the music had any divine secrets of music or of beauty to impart was no longer in any one's mind. That the poetic subjects of such a composer's works should be more or less always one is a matter of necessity. The approximation in the tone poem to the complete view of life as we get it in the novel has with Scriabin become complete. The difference is that while the novel is chiefly compact of observations of life, the tone poem is largely confined to its strivings in the moral and philosophic sense. The composer's theosophical ideas of a contest between an enslaving god and the divine element of freedom in man himself, do not seem radically to distinguish the music from the Wagnerian and other tone struggles in which man, indulging and finally overcoming the sensual elements in his nature, is finally, after fits of dejection, redeemed—one does not quite know whether from them or by them. Musically, all these things amount very much to the same, and in Scriabin's music there seem to be no really opposing themes, but only a struggle of similar themes, all of which have a nobly sensuous character. One

ends by forgetting the programme and enjoying the sound. But while our enjoyment has a divine expansiveness and gusto it has none of those tragic elements that exalt the soul while they wound it; the 'Divine Poem' is just an orgy of fine sound.

## *KOUSSEVITZKI AND MITJA NIKISCH, FEBRUARY* 24, 1925

WHEN we are asked to regard Koussevitzki as the greatest of continental conductors, we may at least in that regard speak freely of him. If we are to judge by his actions and directions as a conductor, his demands are that almost all music should be made intense, vivid, and vibrant. It might be said of Arthur Nikisch that almost all music in his hands had intensity. Koussevitzki appears to carry this intensity a stage farther and insist that it shall be of the vibrant kind. In such a work as the 'Francesca da Rimini' of Tchaikovsky we feel this vibrancy to be essentially right. In one feature only of this terrific music Koussevitzki seemed less effectual than Savonoff, who seemed to bring home to the players more thoroughly the necessity for a strong lateral movement in the tempestuous figures by means of a violent crescendo and urgent accelerando. So our ear judges comparatively of the two great Russian conductors who have with the most authority presented this work before us. Koussevitzki was especially admirable in his treatment of the middle section. The clarinet solo was compelled out of its reflective calm into a more tragic intensity, and every accompanying chord was made to contribute something to this tragic feeling. The ingenious way in which the return of the clarinet melody is introduced and seconded was also made more distinctly a mode of emotional expression than we have found with any other conductor. Probably we know our Handel in this part of the world a deal better than Handel is known where Koussevitzki comes from, and few English listeners, we think, would approve the vibrational method as he applied it to the opening of Handel's Concerto in D minor. It was something like applying this intensity to the slow opening of the 'Messiah' Overture, in place of the simple gravity we all know so well. Koussevitzki by no means follows the Richterian

adages of rhythmical largeness and simplicity of movement. He even simulates the roll of the drum as he directs a Gezink in its performance, also the detailed animation of vivid staccato figures in the liveliness of Handel's animated movement. It makes a fine display on the conductor's part, but whether it can possibly stimulate the players to any immediate sympathy is open to question. That Koussevitzki did stimulate the players to a mood of intensity and virtuosity in the concert generally is beyond question. He himself, we think, was enraptured with the results in the little scherzo movement from Rimsky-Korsakoff's opera 'Tsar Saltan' —a movement which represents 'the flight of a bumble bee'. First the violins, and then Mr. Lingard, the flautist, set off this little piece with such dazzling and fascinating execution that a smile of admiration came over the grim conductor's face. In England we have learned that the smile never dies wholly from the heart of Hans Sachs, but Koussevitzki, in the prelude to the third act of the 'Mastersingers', intensifies the music to the point of pure solemnity. A little slowness crept in and infected, too, the solemn opening of the 'Tannhäuser' Overture, which took on an absolute success only with the entry of the Venusberg section. A lovely close was that of the prelude from the opera 'Khovantchina', by Moussorgsky, where Koussevitzki procured from the horns and wood-wind instruments, as also in the opening of the 'Oberon' Overture, a softness of half-tones to which we are unaccustomed. These were much admired by the general public, but for our own part we questioned their validity in Weber's overture, as the contrasts became, as we thought, unnatural. Wagner, when the body of Weber was removed from England, made a rhetorical speech in which he said an Englishman might understand Weber, and a Frenchman admire him, but only a German could love him. He did not in those days, perhaps, think it worth while to say what a Russian might do with Weber. But we found out on Saturday that Koussevitzki could be very drastic with him—could make him toe the line of strict rhythmical transition like Beethoven himself, and in a way which we dare say Weber never dreamed of, and which, to our feeling, was the absolute ruin of his picturesque quality.

Young Mr. Nikisch set himself to the technical task of playing Liszt's Concerto with a thoroughness of method unimaginable, using the silken or steel leverings of delicate fingers and powerful arms or shoulders with a surprising completeness of effort. 'Look up at the sun,' Liszt is said to have shouted to a pupil, but young Nikisch will have none of this way; his way is that of the caterpillar that is not ashamed to get its head down to its work, and probably no pianist in the Free Trade Hall has ever applied his head and shoulders so closely to the keyboard in the act of technical effort. But to be a Nikisch is to have artistically an inalienable repose, and in this feature the younger Nikisch is as much a classic as his father. Though he wrestled with the keyboard, his playing had the calm of the gods. He snatched brilliance at times with a flying hand, no resource of the pianist being without its use for him. His Liszt had a coruscating brilliance and also a romantic greatness. A finer agreement could not be found between conductor and soloist, and Koussevitzki forgot his own extravagances in serving his young colleague so faithfully. Mr. Nikisch played Chopin's Nocturne in C sharp minor with a greatness of style that was almost slowness, and the A flat Ballade has probably not been played so slowly here by a great player for many years. But the slowness was that of a musician and poet, and the music went home to the hearts of his hearers so thoroughly that he was compelled to add two of the favourite waltzes. These he also redeemed a little from the hands of the stunt players, and recaptured for music. May both he and his conductor colleague come often to challenge our judgement and admiration by their genius!

## *STRAUSS AND GERHARDT, NOVEMBER* 14, 1926

ALTHOUGH the audience was inadequate for a concert of its ambitious type, the concert of Richard Strauss at the Brand Lane Concerts was in itself highly successful and earned for him a reception befitting his greatness as a musician. There was a mood of greater enthusiasm throughout, and there was

at least some music of a godlike kind given in a supremely beautiful and masterful way. It was Strauss's own music which set the concert aflame. After the symphony by Mozart, Elena Gerhardt gave three of Strauss's songs with orchestra: the lullaby 'Meinem Kinde', with its long span of delicate melody; the popular serenade 'Mach' auf! Mach' auf!' with its magic of finely woven fancy; and 'Cäcilie', the most rhapsodic and noble of all the composer's songs. The first revealed immediately that Gerhardt's mezzo-voce tones were in more perfect condition than we have heard them since the war, and this delightful impression was maintained throughout all her singing. The sheer vocal delight of listening to the unflaked and unflawed smoothness of Gerhardt's tones is something not to be paralleled in the world of music. When such perfect marble tones are brought to bear on a song of such rhapsodic wildness and extravagance as 'Cäcilie' there ensues a sort of paradox, for it is scarcely credible that tones of such purity shall fulfil all the extravagant demands of the song. Let us say that never until now had we heard, even from Gerhardt, the tones of this song in their most jagged rudeness filled to what seemed to us their utmost musical capacity. Now, with the composer conducting and the orchestra playing splendidly under his guidance, she triumphed not only over every abrupt declivity of the song, but over the handicap of transposition, and the superb song stood forth in its fullest glory. We think Strauss betrayed a little special pride in the song and in Gerhardt when he allowed such a trying performance to be immediately encored; but the second performance equalled the first, and the two lifted the concert to a height of enthusiasm which it could hardly by any other means have attained. What other music could have so fired the blood of the players for the 'Don Juan' tone poem, whose storm of rhapsody, written in the original key of the song, runs so much the same course? The work began, as it were, in full career, and it had a superb performance. The wood-wind players have shown themselves determined at both concerts to give Strauss a lively sense of their quality. The lovely clarinet and oboe melodies in this tone poem, to which the

composer himself clings with such fondness, could hardly have been given with a more tender grace. Both these melodies and the bar of sweeping waltz melody which forms the main lyric theme are in Strauss's most glowing, sensuous style, and their eloquent and exquisite use makes 'Don Juan' one of the composer's very finest tone poems. Difficulties through the non-arrival of the parts made it impossible at the last to include the 'Love Scene' from 'Feuersnot', and thus Weber, another acknowledged source of Strauss, came, with his 'Euryanthe' Overture, into the scheme. The two concerts have given us, if a less complete Strauss than had been anticipated, an almost complete musical genealogy of Strauss, and in that way have had the fullest educational value. Weber did not vie in absolute colour with his successors in his school—Wagner and Strauss —but he has the claim of priority in the use of the upsoaring melody that is so great a part of his and their musical spirit. The Waltz from 'Rosenkavalier' was taken by Strauss perhaps a little more slowly than we have sometimes heard it in England. But it had all the more of the waltz spirit on that account, and it was so hugely enjoyed that it completed the triumph of Strauss's music at this concert. When it was ended Strauss became the centre of cheers and applause which it did one good to hear. He finished with the 'Mastersingers' Overture—music more fitting than all other to cement the warmth of feeling towards him. His reading had, we thought, more of directness than most other fine readings we have heard. He went from one thing to another, not so much as if he were enlarging his sense of sympathy as if he were emphasizing and confirming it. He found a continuity in the ideas, which had not struck us so forcibly in the reading of any other musician.

The Symphony in G minor of Mozart, which opened the concert, again struck us as attempting a greater dignity than English readings of Mozart. We wished we could have heard the symphony later in the concert, when the instruments had gained a warmer colour and glow. As it was, the tone, in its commanding symphonic grandeur, sounded a little black, and that fascination of refinement which has become a feature of Mozart-playing in

Manchester was less in evidence than the symphonic dignity of style. A point of formal interest was that Strauss finished the menuetto not with the minor ending, but with a repetition of the trio, which gave both a change of mode for the last movement and confirmed the melodic connexion that is suggested between the trio and the subject of the final movement. Mozart is so artless in his art that one can scarcely think of anything in his music as designed. Yet this symphony does show signs of a more thoughtful and consistent poetic connexion than any other of his symphonic works. God forbid that we should ever think him a Beethoven or a Brahms. He is a child of nature; yet he had traits of ultimate grandeur about him, whose last word does not seem to have been revealed to us. He died a composer of mysterious and unplumbed depths.

The songs from Schubert's 'Winterreise', sung by Gerhardt with Strauss at the piano, were cut off from all other music in the later part of the concert by their aloofness and sadness. Their sequence is weakened by selection and inversion, and their separate appeal is far from being their whole appeal. Strauss at the piano took a severely reverential view of his task and was reticent in it to the last degree. Gerhardt sang the songs in a supremely beautiful and quiet way, which made even the slightest transitions of tone often strangely and deeply moving. The transition to the final stanza of 'Der Lindenbaum' was a marvel of pathos and beauty vying with each other. The last two syllables of the song 'Frühlingstraum' which closes 'wann halt' ich mein Liebchen im Arm?' were an intoxication of surprising beauty, yet as infinitely pathetic as lovely. 'Die Krähe', in which the traveller notes how the raven has followed him step by step and wheeled in the air over his head throughout the day, is made penetrating by the way the accompaniment, in equal quavers, follows the line of melody to its tragic close. Strauss played the strumming notes of 'Der Leiermann' with a studied insensibility or insensitiveness. The aloofness of art could go no farther, and there were not wanting outspoken critics of this severe attitude. The well-known 'Serenade' of Schubert, sung with an ineffable loveliness of tone, and 'An die Musik' were

encores perfectly in keeping with the songs which had preceded them. We have never before heard Gerhardt sing with such exquisite art.

## *GERHARDT, APRIL* 1924

BRAHMS, referring, we suppose, to the composer's art, said there was something to be learned from every song of Schubert. Sometimes the secrets of Schubert's art are shown in a very modest way, and we need, perhaps, a more pretentious composer for a guide to find them. But even with such a trifle as 'Das Rosenband', if we take such an ornate setting of the words as that of Strauss for our guide, we may see by a comparison that Schubert gets in most of Strauss's points apparently without an effort, and though their expression is on a smaller scale it is not on that account the less convincing. We find a guide, too, in such a comparison to the subtlety of Gerhardt's art. A listener who regarded only the scale of her expression might think there was a sameness in her whole recital. On Saturday night, when her throat difficulty set a limit of danger to what she undertook, she solved her vocal problem by contracting even more than usual the range of her expression. But she did not lose in this contraction the subtlety of transition which is the great wealth of her singing. Rather did she most artfully refine it, so as to give her listeners everything and convey all her thought within a compacted range. Margaret's song at the spinning-wheel, for instance, might be taken just a shade faster and have a shade more of the miniature in its figuration and poise; but the whole range of its development was there. Not a point was missing, and a comparison of its progression with the indications of the composer would have shown as perfect a fidelity to the composer's ideas as if she had been all out to sing the song for the last time in her life. Then, again, in such a song as the well-known 'Ständchen', where almost every phrase has its lovely transition of tonality and chromatic mutation, Gerhardt showed under every difficulty a sensibility as rare and a rhythmical sentiment as

beautiful as if she had been able to squander her utmost wealth of vocal power upon it. The programme contained many songs which are little sung, and with two such well-known songs as 'Die Allmacht' and 'Ganymed' left out, the recital became rather like a recital of rarities from the composer. As a delicate example of Schubert's art in poetic suggestion which is essential but not obvious, one might cite 'Wiederschein' or 'The Reflection'. The youth sees the reflection of his sweetheart's face in the stream, and the composer must suggest also the sweetheart herself overlooking the stream from the willows. A constant interchange of pitch is kept up in the melody to cover the range of thought as well as vision. The means of expression are very far from any relation to the obviously picturesque. The composer has merely felt the necessity for some such device, and his beautifully moving melody has supplied it. A superficial view would regard it, perhaps, as no more than an example of Schubert's silly tunefulness. Yet without this resort the song would be poetically dead. Gerhardt here gives a living interpretation by no more apparent device than a plain delight in the movement of melody. It is enough for a picture, yet how different from a mere picture! Another song little heard in England is 'Das Lied im Grünen'. In its delicate device by which the poetic refrain both ends and leads in the phrase, and the tender delight of animation its insistent lilt keeps opening out before us, this song has the freshness of the spring's sweetest grasses.

With her restricted powers Gerhardt was kept almost within the terms of such gentle ravishment throughout her recital, and indeed, by her programme, she seemed almost to have chosen a little field to show how resourceful her powers were within it. 'Im Frühling', 'Im Abendrot', 'Geheimes' (whose notes are so keen they are like eyes gleaming at you), 'Schlaflied', and other songs, seemed hardly to expand the range of expression but only in a new way to reveal its vitality. In 'Hark, hark, the lark' Gerhardt accepted the song-books which take out the old-fashioned 'bin' and the rhyme with it from Shakespeare's verse. Surely our greatest poet is to be trusted in such a matter.

## *GERHARDT AND THE LENER QUARTET, MARCH* 13, 1926

The mellow touch of music most doth wound
The soul when it doth rather sigh than sound.

SATURDAY night's concert might have been designed to illustrate the power of soft and quiet tones. Hitherto when Elena Gerhardt has appeared we have felt compelled to open our notice with some general exclamation of admiration for her singing. This time we could write none that would not apply equally to the play- of the Lener Quartet. They began with the B flat Quartet of Mozart, and though, in the early part of the winter, we had heard them play all through the sixteen quartets of Beethoven, this Mozart playing made us willing to forget the whole of that experience in the exquisitely sensitive interpretation of this lovely, unforced music. To hear such soft-breathing music from the strings, such ravishment of tones which give delight and hurt not, and seem born more of the air than of any actual instrument, was an experience which only Mozart's music could supply. And only Mozart played by perfect players, who have the art to conceal every difficulty and to eradicate from their playing every element of hardness and rude modernity which would violate the ideality of his music. Those melting cadences, the dying falls, that pure and poignant chromatic melody, the nimble animation, and loving marriage of melody which gives to his happiest music a linked yet manifold voice, and that immanence of grandeur which all this beauty so subtly bespeaks, were never, surely, expressed in a more gracious way than by these four players whose youth is still comprised within the span of Mozart's own brief life. The applause at some of the Saturday night concerts has been so generally and indiscriminately bestowed as to lead to the conclusion that little beyond a sheer greed for music could inspire it. Yet the spectacle of a great Free Trade Hall audience holding up a concert which had been in progress almost two and a half hours while the most perfect singer in the world was waiting in the wings, and clamouring for more quartet music until at last its demands had to be satisfied, was an experience to hearten every lover of chamber music. Schubert's 'Death and the Maiden' Quartet was the im-

mediate cause of this enthusiasm; but there was also a real determination to let the Lener players know that their playing had given a quite unusual delight. The Free Trade Hall is an exceedingly large hall for chamber music; and we had witnessed once before what we had thought was something very much like the discomfiture of these same players in it. They have had a considerable experience of large halls since that time; and now they sensed at once the delicate acoustic properties of the hall, and ventured most happily on their utmost intimacy of style. We can speak only from listening at close quarters; but the applause of listeners from the back of the hall was a manifest testimony to their complete success.

If the ravishment of beautiful tone was the charm of the Lener players, it was no less the charm of Gerhardt's singing. Schubert is, as we have said often, the one composer who is perfectly fitted to write for Gerhardt's voice. He alone has the flowerlike softness and exquisite mildness of melody in which the loveliness of her singing is most purely seen. Brahms has a mildness in his great strength; and Schumann has the mildness of noble harmony and poetic thought. But neither is a melodist equal to Schubert, and it is in melody that the singer chiefly lives. The thrilling use of soft tones was never in our experience more frequently exemplified in Gerhardt's singing than in her Schubert singing at this concert. Sometimes she would open a line unexpectedly with a soft tone, as in 'Abschied', from the 'Swan Songs', where the opening 'Ade' was of such mellowness and softness as to give a sense of loveliness and ravishment at the very onset, and put the emotions of the listener under the sway of the singer at once. At other times the emotion of a cadence would be enhanced by some lovely final or penultimate note, in which the art of eloquent tone and exquisitely controlled breath were so perfectly blended that the tone had the softness of the purest marble beauty. Always, one imagines, Gerhardt has the sense of this controlled, sculptured lyricism. She swoons into her most beautiful tones with a controlled sensibility that is as beautifully sensuous as the tones are chaste in outline. She seems to have a devotion to Schumann's

pathological songs, and possibly her most masterly performance was of his song 'Wer machte dich so krank'. It presented the old riddle of the romantic melody of spirit, and Schumann's few, long-drawn-out notes seem to give a singer but little chance of making a strong impression. But it was in this song that the unique power of Gerhardt's sustained tones was made most manifest. Were the tones less sensuous in their quality, they could, with their vocal calmness, have but a cold appeal; were they less admirably and passionately controlled, they could not have the godlike exaltation which makes her singing nothing less than a lyrical sculpture. She has a great nobility and energy in 'Der Musensohn', in which Schubert by very simple means rises to the nobility and genius of Goethe. But even in such outbursts there is nothing rough-hewn about Gerhardt's singing. It is always song, and never just declamation. It keeps in all a sort of Greek beauty. She sang two beautiful and well-known airs by Purcell and two English airs of Handel in a way which showed to what heroic heights she could carry the art of florid singing. By these means she was able to bring the least learned of English listeners completely into touch with what is greatest in her art. Let her strengthen this bond with such listeners by more examples of music as admirably chosen to this end. Miss Paula Hegner played with a complete understanding of Gerhardt's requirements. Her treatment of one or two difficult transposed accompaniments was especially judicious.

## *CHALIAPIN, OCTOBER* 1925

THE masterful Chaliapin is sufficient to himself. No one appreciates more than he the value of a little arrogance in musical interpretation, and if only he appreciated its value in the work of his accompanist as in his own work, Mr. Rabinovitch would have an opportunity second to no pianist in the world. Chaliapin, of course, is independent of everybody and would fill the stage himself. Even where an accompaniment is a great part of a song, as in Schumann's 'The Two Grenadiers', Chaliapin

might ignore it, and might make the song as great a success without its aid as with it, for Chaliapin is an actor first and last, and self-sufficing all the time. He would do as well for Heine's ballad without even Schumann's melody as with it. The accompaniment of this song had indeed woefully shrunken in its pride, as we heard it on Saturday; but the song was not shrunken, for Chaliapin made good all its losses in the superb pride of his singing. Although Mozart is in his 'Don Juan' always a symphonic composer in his use of the orchestra, his music waits on Chaliapin as absolutely as does Mr. Rabinovitch in everything. He can hold up a phrase and sun himself, as it were, in its golden smile, before he deigns to release it to his audience; and his audience will feel all the richer for his delays, and love Mozart all the more for the violence that is so openly done to him. Genius transforms everything to itself. 'Chaliapin is always a glorious peasant, and never in the least a poet,' said one sensitive listener on Saturday, in much the same sense that it is sometimes said that Burns is the poet of the unpoetical. There is an almost total absence of poignancy in Chaliapin, although there is such a world of theatrical pathos. While we feel that his theatrical power is such that he is utterly independent of song, he is yet a superb and incomparable singer. Except, it may be, in his long and rather artificial high notes in soft pathetic closes, he rarely descends from the singer to the vocalist. He has none of the scrupulous vocalist's limitations to his song. Always we get the whole man; and he wears himself out in his song, as much as the most convivial of uncultured singers. He is such an actor, such a singer, that he is even independent of language. He sang almost every song in Russian, and though he asked his audience to read the translations of his songs, his actions and his singing were a sufficient annotation, and told his listeners far more about them. He is at home in the melodramatic. When we turn over a book of songs by Rachmaninoff it is with something like dismay that we discover they contain such an amount of frankly melodramatic writing. This composer's songs are many of them dedicated to the great baritone, and there seems to be something of perspicuity as well as of compliment in the dedications. Without melodrama we

should hardly get the essential Chaliapin. But besides this plentiful pathos there is in Chaliapin an abounding geniality and humour. His humour is not essentially sardonic, but genial; just as is the humour of Burns, in spite of his power to sting. An aristocracy could scarcely have produced a Burns, and no more could aristocracy have produced a Chaliapin. Such men are dedicate to the under-half of humanity. They help us to invert in the imagination the established order of things, and regard all men who can show their share of human nature as equal.

## *ROSING*, 1919

'My aim is truth,' said Moussorgsky at the beginning of his career, and lived through the short and bitter life which followed merely to make the saying good. His lot was no doubt all the harder because he did not see truth in its easiest or even its loveliest aspects. He was not without love, for it was eyes and ears to him, but he loved more through pity than through joy, and it is by the fires of love and pity that he throws such a lurid light on ugliness and vice when they are powerful, and the natural terrors which come home, indeed, at last to all, but are ever present with the poor and the oppressed.

It was no accident that Moussorgsky figured most largely in the recital of Rosing—'the soul of Russia'—last night. If any part of the public is doubtful about Rosing as a singer, it is because, while he sings, he does not think first of pleasing or of what is purely musical; his aim is truth. He too ignores truth in some of its easiest and most alluring aspects, and loves most to express himself through pity and the sword of pity—irony. We do not much care to have poetic ideas parcelled out or their subject-matter classified as they were in Rosing's programme. The emotions are best caught unaware, and the imagination should have a free field.

We had not heard Rosing before, but for us the question whether Rosing is really a beautiful singer, and not merely a more or less dramatic one, was settled completely in his favour by his opening song of national aspiration, 'My Beloved Country', by

Gretchaninov. One had heard he was not a beautiful singer, and one had heard what was absolutely inconsistent with this view—that he had at times a most perfect and beautiful intonation. Here, at the very opening of his recital, was the intonation of ravishing purity. The Russian language, by its constant palatization of vowel sounds, both in their inception and their release, as we find in the English word 'dew', lends to the vocalization a peculiar delicacy and rhythmic buoyancy which in such a song add the last touch of ravishment to the poetic impression. Rosing has also an upper register of great refinement and natural intensity, and the song ran into the most beautiful region of his voice. In the extremes of expression the language exaggerates the pathetic and lends vividness to the barbaric, but the full stream of beautiful tone such as the Italians delight in, and which we in England imperfectly emulate, would be impossible in the Russian tongue.

Rosing sings wholly from memory, as every singer should, except in some types of sacred music, and he departs, as every singer should, from the stilted and wholly impertinent manners usual in concert singing. We mean impertinent, of course, in the artistic sense. A singer, even the most lyrical singer, must do something with his person, and he has only a choice between the appropriate and the inappropriate to the task in hand. Viewed from this, the only true standpoint, Rosing's actions are modesty itself, and in their sufficiency and sympathy they are genius itself. He has one fine quality that marks also the singing of Ackte, the great Finnish singer. He is ashamed of no human emotion. This fact gives their singing at times the mysterious animal quality which is the very test of truth when its emotions can be recognized with certainty, and is the highest proof of genius. And Rosing no more than Ackte belongs to the race of singers who make such daring ventures a general excuse for ugliness. On the contrary, it is the beauty that so constantly marks the truth and the sincerity of such attempts. Truth is invention, and though the language in which Rosing sang was so far unknown to his audience, there was no want of variety or of certainty in the impressions made.

The admirable accompaniments to the songs, played, we think, by

Mr. Kiddle, in place of Mme Rosing, were in themselves a very good guide to the listener's understanding. Though the melodic cadences and the iterations, often eloquently pathetic or humorous, give a very consistent character to the Russian musical idiom, it has, perhaps because of these very qualities, remained comparatively free from the banality of accompaniment figures as we know them. The programme in its general character exploited very freely, especially in the pathetic and the grotesque, fields of expression very little used in our Western music. In their freshness of array they in a degree overwhelm the imagination. They may be said to raise the question, how far it is admirable in the poetic sense for man to be conscious of his condition and destiny. Is it the lot or the nature of the Russian people which makes the pathetic and the grotesque rise to such heights in their music?

## *GALLI-CURCI, NOVEMBER* 1924. I

We are told that the human voice is an oboe. One need not hear more than a few notes from Galli-Curci to have this view of the human voice brought home to the mind. The gramophone had belied her. It had given her out as a brilliant but somewhat hard singer. Her first notes dispelled that idea of her singing. They told us at once that she was eminently a vocal singer, and what they said her whole recital bore out. Nothing became her singing better than the two old Italian airs by Bononcini and Pergolese with which she began. She is very much a child of nature. Singers and singing-masters set traps for beautiful tone, and rarely find their best-laid schemes result in anything recognizably natural, and often enough the main stock of fine singers is bestowed by some happy disposition of nature itself in their favour. Galli-Curci is not, like many of our most powerful singers, a greatly imposing personality in herself. More than in the normal case her gift seems to lie in the vocal apparatus. The raising of the upper lip, which is a feat apparently done with difficulty by most florid vocalists, is with Galli-Curci not just second nature but is instinct in her smile and her whole demeanour. The broadly set

vowel again, hard to acquire, is with her by nature something prodigious. The bird-like tremor of the throat and chin are further signs that the vocal powers are in the highest state of natural perfection. And, like the powers of the bird and of the oboe to which we have likened them, her vocal powers do not tempt any high degree of tension or any exploitation in the expression of passion. They serve for their own sakes, and one asks no further of them. The audacity which is in some singers the last degree of vocal art and with which the gramophone endows her is not, when we hear the singer herself, especially hers. Her sweetness is emphatically that of the reed, and not just that of the liquid voice. The gramophone robs her voice of just this reedy sweetness, and gives you in its stead something of brilliance and hardness. It was a commonly expressed view that she was a better singer for the gramophone than for the platform. That is not our view, for we find the records have more of greatness but are scarcely lovable, while in her singing on the platform there is a lovable quality but less of greatness. We found the voice tuneable enough, the execution often sweet, fastidious, and delectable.

Had Galli-Curci sung the right things of Mozart—'Batti, batti' and the like—we have the conviction that we should have been enraptured. But Meyerbeer, Ambroise Thomas, and Donizetti have little in them to enrapture us, and what sweetness Galli-Curci bestowed on them was something delightful in itself but a little beside the mark. Yet for our own part we are quite willing to have the Mad Scene from 'Lucia' transformed to such sweetness, and the old iron of Meyerbeer softened to our ear. The 'Polonaise' from Mignon, sung as it was in Italian, gained much of vocal substance and lost something of its volatility. Galli-Curci proved herself almost wholly a Latin singer. Her one superb feat was the rapid articulation of the air 'Clavelitos', by Valverde, in Spanish. It was naturally encored, and was repeated as superbly. In 'Schneeglöcklein' of Schumann and Schubert's 'Who is Sylvia?' sung in German, the German type of expression was so little set that many of her audience might never realize the feat had been attempted. For familiar English airs, Galli-Curci

is also far too much attached to the Italian vocalization, by which we mean the Italian vowels. 'Living echo' opening with a long Continental sound, and 'Warbling bird' opening with a vowel as in 'are', will not do, even for an air of Bishop. These examples are enough to show that the musical beauty of the English language is as yet but partially serviceable to her use. 'Robin Adair' she sang too quickly for either its pride or its pathos.

Mr. Homer Samuels played in a way thoroughly apt for Mme Galli-Curci's singing, though in the true musical sense he was too much given to self-effacement. Of the ballads given his own 'Pierrot' was the best, and it was pretty to hear him hit off the piano reflection of its little vocal cadenza. For the rest, as we have said, Galli-Curci does not appear yet to be sufficiently a master of familiar English to gain much even with the general ear by descending from the florid airs which, we take it, she regards as classic, and which she sings so well. We should be sorry to discourage Galli-Curci from singing the English and German songs with which her vocal powers make her so well fitted to deal; but at the present her mastery and supremacy are of necessity confined to music of the Latin schools. That she is a lovely singer within this sphere, though not, in her command of sublimity or grandeur, specifically a great singer, is our present estimate. But we by no means feel that her powers are by nature confined to this her present sphere of mastery.

## *GALLI-CURCI, NOVEMBER* 1924. II

Mme Galli-Curci had a still greater audience for the second of her recitals at the Brand Lane Concerts, and was herself in better voice and more speedily at home with her audience and with her work. She sang with something more of the vigour which we associate with her gramophone records. One of her first airs, 'Pur dicesti' of Lotti, tempted a comparison with Patti, who rarely gave more than one or two encore pieces without including it. The difference, to our appreciation, was less in point of execution than in those more intangible elements of the florid style which

were strictly proper to its period, and are beyond all measure difficult to retain and in every succeeding generation more difficult to acquire. Just as we may hear all the great violinists in the world to-day play the Mendelssohn Concerto, and yet not hear from any the style and tone which would completely fill and yet not break the mould of Mendelssohn's music as we heard this work so often from Lady Hallé, so we are not likely to hear from any prima donna of our day the grace of 'Pur dicesti' as we heard it from Patti. Hers was a style which seemed to fill every note of an easeful air by Mozart or such an old air as 'Pur dicesti' with just the right amount and the right quality of golden tone. To hear her was to the musician as undisturbed and unalloyed a pleasure as the sight of the printed page, on which the music stands with an abstract purity of design and makes its own quality of tone to the mental ear. Galli-Curci is not a singer who appeals to us so much in this way. She interests us very much by the way she does things, and until we have heard her the printed page will not give us very much idea what she will do. Hers is a style, rather, born of the execution itself. It surprises us and entrances us more by its separate parts than by the grace and formal relation of the whole. The discussion of the public still runs very much on the impeccability or otherwise of Galli-Curci's pitch. Our impression is still what it was at the beginning—that Galli-Curci's most rapid execution is so easy to follow and works out so beautifully at the close of her phrases that there can be nothing seriously wrong with it even from the most fastidious standpoint. Whatever mixed impression it may give must be more a matter of tone quality than of the singer's ear. Sometimes when she starts *ex abrupto* or takes a rising note from some distance the note may not strike the ear as so brilliant in pitch as the ear has expected. But the sequel in the phrase itself or its continuation will give a complete testimony to the purity of the singer's ear. The expressive reed quality of the singer's voice would seem to be the only disturbing factor, and it is an ingratitude to grumble at what is the very essence of the singer's originality and charm.

Galli-Curci chose to exploit somewhat further her mastery over

the rapid articulation of the Spanish tongue. She sang a second air, 'Carceleras', of this type, and not only repeated it, but sang twice as an encore the air 'Clavelitos', given the previous week, and gave all with a superb abandonment and freedom. This extraordinary rapidity, life, and flexibility of utterance all point strongly to a physiological basis for Galli-Curci's vocal gifts. There would seem to be a splendid savage in her somewhere, for this kind of quality comes not out just by the painful acquirement of study. Galli-Curci also indulged the shake freely in all parts of the voice, and we were made to wonder most at one extremely low shake that was superbly done. Yet her shake did not always give us the impression of a clear or pure diatonic trill. It was of extreme rapidity, and at its finest seemed almost to undulate in its general pitch. Here again was a case in which genius or a supreme natural gift might freely use traits which to the normal singer would be deemed inadmissible.

In the air 'Caro nome', from 'Rigoletto', there was some want of warmth and affection in the opening of the air, but an exceedingly fine execution as the air proceeded and developed its florid aspects. One felt that not this air but the 'Shadow Song' from 'Dinorah', which closed her recital, was her supreme technical triumph. Here, as in her florid airs the previous week, she was most faithfully accompanied by Mr. Berenguer, the flautist, who matched her execution with every perfection of detail. Still, in the last reaches the voice travelled free of accompaniment and was at these times of surprising brilliance. 'Lo! here the gentle lark' of Bishop was also replete with cadenza work of greater brilliance than any of her singing the previous week. More of feeling and beauty endowed the air 'Come per me sereno', from Bellini's opera 'La Sonnambula'.

One might have doubted whether Galli-Curci had the power to swoon into lovely melody of an intoxicating kind had it not been for the 'Chanson Indoue', from Rimsky-Korsakoff. Here Galli-Curci closed her eyes and gave herself up to the realization of the chromatic mutations with an exquisite art. Schumann's 'Mondnacht' was a romantic German song of finer substance than those

of the first recital, and it was beautifully played by Mr. Samuels. Its spaciousness was also realized in the voice, though the song still made apparent the gulf that is fixed between Italian and German music. The song by Treharne, a professor of composition at the McGill University, Montreal, to Shelley's 'A widow bird sat moaning for her love' is more beautiful and expressive in its bound phrases than in its more general setting of the text; and a similar grace of bound notes, inspired by the singer's voice and manner, was apparent in two other American songs, one by Mr. Samuels himself. Galli-Curci set the penultimate syllables of the cadences in 'The Last Rose of Summer' somewhat differently from the air than is our English custom, and not, we think, in what would be Moore's own way. Here was another example of the difficulty with which old fashions are reinstated.

## *McCORMACK, FEBRUARY* 1927

'SENTIMENT, sir, sentiment, sentiment, Irish sentiment; it is a wonderful thing when it will bring together an audience like this, and send us all home so happy.' In such wise might one of McCormack's most enthusiastic admirers volunteer to the world his psychological explanation of the McCormack concert on Saturday. It might be Irish sentiment, strengthened a little, too, by Irish propagandism, but it was also partly to be explained by something else a little nearer to music. For John McCormack has a very genuine, though very small and confined, lyrical gift, and, as we know from another case, a gift need only be a very small one, if it is simple and true, in the lucky case, to bring the world to your feet. McCormack is a singer and not at all a vocalist, and his singing would be as much in place by a turf fire as in the concert-hall. He has not a great voice, and it was essential that he should be jealous of every footfall at the entrances; for, as we discovered on leaving the hall at the last, there was some difficulty in hearing him at a distance when there was the least disturbing noise. We have rarely known a singer use so few adventitious aids to his singing, and he is singularly consistent in his style.

If a score of photographs had been taken during the recital we think they would have revealed very little difference beyond the greater or less opening of the mouth necessary to the expression. There is a certain pathos in his singing, even in his humorous singing; yet though the tear seems never far away, it never comes near enough to do anything more than enrich the general expression. The vowels also, though remarkably pure, are not absolutely free from the bleating suggestion known in many famous Irish singers. He has a definite artistic power, which is mainly to be found in the fine way he draws a lyrical stanza together, in its latter half, and as it approaches its close. The finest example of it was in the two stanzas of the Italian air 'Luoghi sereni e cari', and the repetition of the effect showed it to be entirely conscious and deliberate in its technical art. As an old singer put it, they were two fine spans of melody. The pleasure of this formal lyrical mastery was felt wherever opportunity offered, and as it was an effect free from sentiment it was musically the most pleasurable feature of the recital. McCormack did not altogether eschew the tawdry concert endings even of his beloved folk melodies, but they were free from arrogance, and we do not think they could be regarded as an essential part of his singing. Although he has been praised, and by the leading critics, for his legato singing, we doubt whether he has any real legato in the extreme sense of the vocalist. He never seems to try to bind words together in his song more closely than they are bound in speech, and this we think is the real test of the purist's vocal line. His words come trippingly on the tongue, and we think he might have sung the whole of Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads without doing the slightest offence to their fastidious homeliness.

Yet, when one has acknowledged all these rare virtues, the indictment of monotony which might be brought against him is terribly severe. Almost it may be said that, having heard one song, one has heard all. It would, we think, be difficult to substantiate any claim for changeful and characteristic colour in his singing. Its changes might almost absolutely be indicated by the indications *f*, *mf*, *mp*, *p*, *pp*, and so on, as for a fixed musical instrument. He attempted

no real florid singing, and no dramatic singing in the grand sense. If he sang occasional high notes he did not display his high notes with any special pride, and he could have been just as successful, we felt, within the modest compass of the staff. It was marvellous how he kept almost entirely to composers of reputation and yet gave hardly at all the impression of an imposing recital, but placed no barrier whatever between himself and the lowliest of his audience. It was, we think, a simple audience, and, in the instrumental sense, possibly as green to music as could well be found.

## *CASALS AND A HALLÉ CONCERT, DECEMBER* 1925

THE foggy night thinned the audience even for Casals at the Hallé Concert, but we thought the absence of any really great work on the programme might also have had something to do with the diminished attendance. One such great work makes a concert, and no programme which does not contain one can be altogether satisfactory for a Hallé Concert. Sir Hamilton Harty apparently likes a programme in which the works have some association of subject or period. This idea is good in its way; its danger is that such associations are more easily found in the secondary veins of music than in the great masterpieces. Last night we had the 'Hebrides' Overture of Mendelssohn, the Scherzo from his 'Scotch' Symphony, and the 'Hebridean' Symphony of Bantock. The 'Hebrides' Overture is, we think, by a pretty general consent, about the high-water mark of Mendelssohn. Yet the overture belongs essentially to the pre-Wagnerian period of the picturesque, and it is easily over-emphasized. Sir Hamilton was evidently anxious to make something more of it than is usually made; yet one could not but be doubtful about the result, which brought the melodic features of the work out of their haze of distance and set them bluntly before our ears at close quarters. The value of such effects of distance in the romantic picturesque was well understood, and can be gathered from many poems of the period, among others from the beautiful Hebridean poems of Wordsworth. A typical performance of Mendelssohn's 'Hebrides' Overture should preserve these in every

possible way, and this performance, just because of its fine tumult, could not sufficiently do that. The Scherzo of the 'Scotch' Symphony answered much more finely to Sir Hamilton Harty's vivid treatment. One does not, of course, reconcile oneself easily to an excerpt from a symphonic work at a Hallé Concert; though the psalm-singing part of this work is both tedious and sentimental. If we must come down to single movements, let it be at the minor concerts. If Mendelssohn's overture was over-emphasized or treated as one might say with a realism dangerous to its romance, the 'Hebridean' Symphony of Bantock suffered from the application of a too fastidious taste which weakened its realistic features, and even brought about something of disconnexion. This work, too, is romantic, but by a sort of poetic haze, or a ground swell, which brings, not the murmur of the sea merely, but the strength of the sea all about us. The composer himself is partly responsible for the weakening of the realism in the work by his cutting down of the pibroch calls, whose insistence awakened some little derision when the symphony was first performed. As performed last night, this aspect of the work has certainly become too submerged and too mild. Bantock is, we say with all respect, an untidy composer. He is not improved by any fastidiousness spent upon him, but is best left in the rough, with his great traits joined loosely together by the natural strength and roughness which are inherent in even his secondary features. Set his melodies in too strong relief from the rest, and they too become disconnected. Bantock himself was never nice about the performance of his music, and it is an ill turn to that music to be in any sense too nice about it. The symphony, to speak paradoxically, was played too well, and the pains of much fine playing would have been better spared. There was much powerful playing which was in every way admirable, yet did not meet with its full reward, as the rest fell away into too fine a sphere. The string solos were not, for their prominence and ideality, too perfectly in tune, though for the most part they were beautiful in tone. The orchestral scene from 'The Trojans', by Berlioz, gained greatly by the enlarged orchestra and the tumult of the string playing. It was, so far as we heard, the great orchestral

feature of the concert. If we must have our dramatic music in the concert-room, could not Sir Hamilton Harty let us hear more of this opera, which contains perhaps the most beautiful music of Berlioz? The tenor and soprano duet, Dido's first solo with chorus, and the final solo of Dido are all things of supreme beauty, as doubtless Sir Hamilton Harty well knows.

Casals, in choosing the B flat Concerto of Boccherini, had to rely for its beauty very much on the sheer beauty of his playing. The first movement was not quite free from a restless, contentious element; and it was not till the slow movement that the ravishment of his playing asserted itself. What delightful long notes he gave us, and what expressive shakes! His captivating way of playing the subject of the final movement would also have made any rondo subject fascinating; while, for once, the cadenzas were amongst the choice parts of the work. Of his shorter solos, which he played with Mr. Dawber at the piano, the Allegro by Senaille was the most fascinating both in melody and execution. It was interesting, on national grounds, to hear the fine emphasis of melody and the captivating transitions of tone in his plucked notes with which he gave the Intermezzo from the 'Goyescas' of Granados. Whether there is any real passion in the Allegro Appassionato of Saint-Saëns is open to argument, but that the music has style, in the superficial sense, would not be contested by any one who heard Casals play it. Yet for the supreme musical moment of the concert, one could choose none other than the unaccompanied Bourrée from Bach which he added as an encore. Without Bach we cannot hear Casals; without Casals, one sometimes feels inclined to say, we cannot hear Bach.

## *SUGGIA AT A HALLÉ CONCERT, OCTOBER* 1924

GUILHERMINA SUGGIA played the 'Cello Concerto of Schumann, but she also played the favourite Sonata of Valentini with Sir Hamilton Harty at the pianoforte, and her playing had in this older piece such inimitable charm of style that one is obliged to regard her playing of the Concerto as quite the secondary feat

of the two. The contrast was, indeed, so clear as to enable us to decide that Suggia is a player with whom manner and style count for more than force of expression, as they did, of course, with music generally until quite recent times. And a player who takes up a viol of any kind as a solo instrument becomes so far an antiquarian as to be driven almost to the worship of the antique style. Schumann's 'cello concerto carries a burden of sadness not perhaps altogether intended by the composer, and it is only a quite rare and masterful interpreter like Casals who can wholly break through the barrier which this cloud makes for the listener. The slow movement is, of course, a short stretch of lovely melody, and this movement was the most beautiful feature of Suggia's playing. The work was most beautifully accompanied, and Suggia's playing was never anything less than admirable, but it took only a few notes of the Sonata to reveal that in this work we hear quite another and a more charming Suggia. We felt here that we heard for the first time the player who has explored the utmost limits of her instrument. The brave chords, which are graphic both in their lowest and highest notes, and have such a firm and lovely sweep of tone, have no sooner awakened our wonder than some little fragment of echoing melody, some bewitching staccato or the like, will turn our admiration to the other extreme and make us think for the instant that all art is in the refinement of miniature effect. And then, when a long stretch of broken chords begins to gather tone to the movement's climax, what player could ever hold on more finely or more surely to the superb close? And as if to show us that these things were by no means necessary to her power over us, when the lovely intermediary movement of the Sonata opens, how complete her hold of us with its suave and simple melody! Admiration ran high, though charm ran rather lower, in the free execution of the masterful cadenza near the close of the work; and then, before she dismissed us, she gathered up her graces again for a few cadential notes, and the miracle ended.

## *JELLY D'ARANYI IN THE BRAHMS VIOLIN CONCERTO, HALLÉ CONCERT, FEBRUARY* 1926

The violin concerto of Brahms is always something towards which, in the musical sense, the highest may aspire, and Miss d'Aranyi in choosing it made the concerto the main feature of the concert. She played it, in her own way, magnificently. It is a work, one may say, for a man, and she put a good deal of womanly waywardness into it; but one is tempted to feel in her case, as Mozart is reported to have said, that there is something more charming in the really good playing of a woman than a man can ever acquire. Her waywardness did not rob the music of its classic quality, but bestowed an additional vitality upon it. In the sequences of figuration she rarely kept the dead level of rhythm. Always she was hurrying, or steadying, to a climax; but everywhere there was nature, and the security of a sound artistic impulse in the hastening or the steadying of the movement; there was rhythm and vitality in every kind of fluctuation, and a purity of execution which lent a classical repose to the whole. More rigid and precise in her execution of the broken notes at the opening than the conductor of the orchestra seemed to expect, she did not allow so much time as he for the first exaltation of the opening subject, and a unified rhythm had to be settled gradually. Here was almost the only sign in the course of the whole work that she did not possess the sheer strength in the bow arm of the greatest men players; and it was her own over-scrupulous exactitude of rhythm more than any unnatural exaction on the composer's part that betrayed the weakness. Miss d'Aranyi is indeed, despite her charming waywardness, a tyrant with herself in regard to the exacting demands of classical rhythm; even Brahms, we think, allows here, in his main subject, for a little expansion and exaltation of both rhythm and melody. A listener in the distance might feel, we think, that the concerto was too loudly accompanied. The noble tone of Brahms's D major, coming after so much fastidious writing of Haydn in related keys, had an overwhelming sonority. The orchestra showed its fullest pride in this tone, and the 'cellos especially seemed more effectually placed for a full effect than at some concerts. The slow movement, which shows such an open kinship with the 'Sapphic Ode' of the

composer, brought about a more intoxicating blend of instruments; and the violin sinking down with its figured melody through the luscious beauty of the wood-wind notes was proof enough that Brahms, though not a Wagner or a Strauss, had secrets of his own of which these orchestral musicians knew nothing. The Hungarian movement with which the concerto closes gave a licence to Miss d'Aranyi's wildest impulses of rhythm. We wondered at times, and again in the Paganini caprices, whether her E string were the most responsive that might have been on her instrument; but her demands on it were so exorbitant, and also on the athletic readiness of the listener's ear, that what seemed a scantiness of tone might be only a scantiness of one's own musical agility and imagination. It is possibly just an unspoken compliment to Joachim that this concerto does not carry a cadenza written by the composer himself. It was, we think, to Joachim's cadenza that Miss d'Aranyi took us back: our virtuoso players have run after Auer of late years; but a cadenza of a great classical concerto should first of all have classical qualities, and it was especially becoming of Miss d'Aranyi to bring this fact so forcibly home to us. That Miss d'Aranyi is something essentially different from a show player could be felt in the dryness of Paganini's chromatic study. The well-known A minor Variations were finer in effect, and served further to remind us how much greater music Brahms had made of them. There was hardly time to tame the mood of the listener down to Bach after these fireworks, and it could not be done in a single short movement.

## *KREISLER, DECEMBER* 1924

KREISLER's recital attracted an even larger audience than the prima donna concerts. Yet one must grudge Kreisler to any concert with no more than a pianoforte accompaniment, and deem it a loss that a player whom we have been used to hear with the orchestra in the concertos of Beethoven, Brahms, and Bach should decline on the star recital with pianoforte

only. We have felt the same want of artistic justification in the afternoon recitals of the Gentlemen's Concerts in times past, and the mere bulk of an audience makes no difference to the art problem. Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto is one of the worst to give with pianoforte alone, for its colour and even garishness are of its essence, and robbed of its orchestral colour it is a very incomplete work. That Kreisler should have become one of the players who are too famous to afford an orchestra is a thing to be regretted. The public performance of a concerto without an orchestra, in the manner of the practice-room, is no more to be commended in him than in any lesser player. So far does Kreisler surpass every other player in the interpretation of the severer classics that to hear him without hearing him in them is, in a sense, not to hear him at all.

Yet not for all these regrets must we stint our admiration of what Kreisler did at this concert. Kreisler is a high-mettled player in every connexion, and his supreme mastery is not confined to the severe classics with which we love best to associate him. He is given to tossing his head aloft with certain actions of the bow; his eye, in moments of energy, has the fire of a steed alert; the comparison of his whole bearing with that of the high-mettled steed is one that no one who has seen him play can have escaped. Given such music as has the wild gipsy blood, Kreisler can set its wildness to a higher mood than any player in the world. Such wildness of nature both the music of Grieg and the music of Tchaikovsky possess. Kreisler also has what often the wild player has not—the power to fill out every note to a kind of technical perfection which makes you feel that no atom of the music is lost. A further miracle is that this technical conscientiousness breeds in him no heaviness. His playing is in every sense highly strung; it is taut to the last degree. His chordal playing at the end of the cadenza to the first movement of Tchaikovsky's concerto had the sound of miniature horns or trumpets; it took the mind to the lively band competitions of Paris, where the haughty trumpetings go on without end and can be heard in all degrees of miniature pomp, sounding between yourself and Elfland the whole day through. The Slavonic Fantasy

of Dvořák, the sonata of Grieg, the concerto of Tchaikovsky, were all replete with the traits of poetic savagery. Mr. Charlton Keith, the accompanist, who had tightened up his style considerably since his last appearance here with Kreisler, took his part in the sonata bravely, and not a note failed of its due point throughout the work. The sonata is not free from frequent harmonic barrenness, while melodically it is full of character. Kreisler gave the lovely melody of the second movement with every possible beauty of tone, and the plucked notes of the last movement with vividness. The melodic themes of the Tchaikovsky concerto have a more violent tang than almost anything outside of Puccini. They lose connexion in the maintenance of this quality when the work is given without orchestra. While Kreisler preserves their intensity, there is also something about his style which very greatly ennobles them. It was marvellous that in a work of this garish character an impression of perfectness should be created. In the second part of the concert Kreisler gave a number of small pieces each distinguished by some special charm, and gave them mostly in his own arrangement: an expressive melody of Gluck; a 'Chanson et Pavane' which showed the exquisite grace of Couperin; a 'Song without Words' of Mendelssohn, curiously transposed and almost unrecognizable in its new form; a lively and dainty scherzo of Dittersdorf; an 'Indian Ballad' ('Pale Moon') by F. Knight Logan, which was encored; and in the end half a dozen other pieces not on the programme. Before the end the applause became so demonstrative that it had an odd contrast with the miniature nature of the music.

## *ELMAN, FEBRUARY* 1927

TIME has dealt kindly with old Italian fiddles and old Italian music. It has softened whatever of garishness they had and toned them into harmonies which have in their very softness a kind of beauty and dignity. Few musicians to-day, perhaps, except those whose particular instrument or voice brings them into active

contact with it, have any clear-cut memories of this old Italian music. It has style and period, with the minimum of individuality, and is classical almost without responsibility. Of such pleasantly expressive music was the Sonata by Nardini with which Mischa Elman opened his recital. One had cause to be thankful for such music, too, before the recital was over, for much of the programme had a dryness which compared badly with this luscious old-world music. Elman is what may be termed before everything a satisfying player. He has neither the austerity nor the verve of a Kreisler. He is a full, broad, and yet soft player, with all the arts and resources of technique and musicianship in masterful control, and he is disposed to take the utmost licence that supreme musicianship allows in expounding his music to his audience. For this last reason he was held by some austere judges at this concert to be not a classical player. This judgement we thought hard, for while we felt the freedom of Elman's playing we did not find that it went beyond what a ripe musicianship might allow. The bone of contention was the playing of the Bach Chaconne. There is no doubt that it lost something of the austerity with which a Kreisler or a Joachim would endow it. Yet we could not but wonder at the superb ease and masterly expansion of rhythm by which the formal beauties of the unique work were expounded so that a child might hear the whole thing with delight. The chaconne, once so popular or so much venerated that a great violinist could hardly visit Manchester without playing it, has been little played in Manchester during recent years, and it is a natural conclusion that most of our players find its successful exposition beyond them. It is, in fact, many a long year since we heard any interpretation which for technical mastery and musicianship would compare with that of Elman. He has, we think, a range of tone greater than that of any player we have heard for a long, long time. His breadth of tone one moment surprises us, and at another we find him crowding such a multitude of beautiful notes into some comprehensive and lightly flung phrase that their grace compels as great admiration. With such a broad range of means at his disposal, the masterful nature of his musicianship, in a work like the

Bach Chaconne, was overwhelming. But the chaconne was the one thing worth going to the recital to hear. The Concerto No. 4 of Vieuxtemps belongs, surely, to the Twilight of the Fiddlers, and not to the living world of music. This composer's concertos are doubtless written to be played with orchestra, but we never remember to have heard one played in this full-dress manner. However essential to the practice-room such pieces may be, this fact is sufficient to prove that they are not regarded seriously as music.

Much of Elman's later music resolved itself into a display of light spiccato playing. It included a dexterous performance of an Étude-Caprice by Rode, made more intricate and difficult by additions from Elman's own pen. There was an encore piece of much the same type, and a somewhat sensational transcription, also by the concert-giver, of the small Pianoforte Nocturne from Grieg. In one piece only did we find the freedom of Elman destructive to the rhythm, and that was, strangely enough, in the well-worn Polonaise of Wieniawski, with which the programme concluded. Here it was not freedom of rhythm merely which produced the effect, but elaboration of fastidious treatment. Both Elman and his accompanist, Mr. Percy Kahn, are players whose execution has the utmost ravishment of style. Their fine execution and fastidious taste here for once seemed to overshoot their mark, and an old war-horse that is usually hard and heavily driven became a sort of Queen Mab scherzo. Schubert's long-suffering 'Ave Maria' was groaning under the dual burden of Wilhelmj and Liszt when we left, and was, of course, being as superbly played. Altogether the recital was very thin fare for a musician who was not first and last a fiddler.

## *HEIFETZ, NOVEMBER* 1925

Mr. Jascha Heifetz brought to the Brand Lane Concerts in Mr. Isidor Achron, his accompanist, a musician possibly more gifted than himself. He played also, among his solos, a small piece mislabelled by the hackneyed German title 'Stimmung', composed by Mr. Achron—a distinctly Oriental melody, with the Eastern

manner used to more passionate expression than we, for the most part, find it, set against striking rhythms and figuration, and disappointing only in its brevity because it hardly seemed set to a simple lyric mood, but promised to our ears a more discursive development.

The two gifted players began their evening with Beethoven's 'Kreutzer' Sonata. They were both alien in their nature to the German classical school, and there could be no wonder that the great opening movement of this work, with its rugged Beethoven character, should be less fascinating in their hands than the richly ornamented air with variations and the concluding movement with its tarantelle rhythm. The two players soon showed their tendency constantly to vary the rhythm with subtle changes, and instead of maintaining the persistent rhythm and poignancy of the two notes whose repetition leads so finely into the passionate main movement they attempted even here a variety which endangered the whole idea. The impatient trampling of the crotchet movement in the opening subject of the quick movement had so much of brilliant staccato that it was somewhat shorn of strength, and when in the working out we came to the great stampede of double notes for the piano, the passage seemed robbed of its finest character and energy by mere speed. But great artists have often been guilty of such misinterpretation before now, without losing a jot of their fame, as, for example, Sarasate, who played this same sonata movement with much the same want of classical energy. And in his case, as in that of these two players, there was plenty left to admire in the subtle treatment of both melody and sequential figuration and the flawless beauty of the execution. When we came to the variations, our players were in their true element of subtle bravura ornamentation. The pianist gave us the first glimpse of the executive skill and brilliant yet delicate nuance which together served to set out the smallest particles of sound with a microscopic brightness and clarity. Most fine players have some grace peculiar to themselves whose frequent presence we learn to look for, and in the playing of Heifetz it was the fascinating pianissimo into which he softened off exceedingly high and

rapid passages. The famous variation of rapid notes for the violin set off this grace inimitably well. The minor variation found a deeper vein in the musical nature of the two players, and the alternating phrases of the last florid variation found them skilful to the utmost in that pleasing emulation of subtle phrasing and execution which made this variation so beautiful at the hands of Sir Charles and Lady Hallé in the olden days. A stroke of genius came in the opening of the lovely coda by Mr. Achron on the piano alone. The solemnity of his touch at once cut off all that had previously gone and brought a gravity into the music that was enhanced by every change as it worked onwards to the close. This coda marked our two players as men of the first rank, whatever they might have done with any other part of the sonata.

Heifetz next played the great Chaconne of Bach for violin alone. Possibly no one in the hall had heard the piece more perfectly played in every technical way. The reading had an elaboration which somewhat obscured the cadential simplicity of the falling chords on which the whole piece is built. We think for that reason the performance would gain for Bach few fresh lovers or understanding disciples. But for one who might be already familiar enough with the work to follow the emotional elaboration of its sequences there was a world to admire in the fidelity and dexterity of their working out, the masterly tone, the passionate climaxes, and the consistency of the whole reading with itself. The tone of Heifetz has, we believe, increased considerably in the short time since he first played here, and is now of an imposing mastery and security that may vie with the perfection and rapidity of his execution. He was recalled, and played a preludial movement in perpetual motion, in which the style was set forth far more truly and which was musically far more satisfying.

In the lighter music after the interval Heifetz showed not less but more wholly himself. In the 'Perpetuum Mobile' of Ries, which was possibly the least worthy music on the programme, he was the most fascinating of all, and, without lowering in any way either the energy or the impeccability of his execution, we believe he played the violin more rapidly than we had ever before heard it played.

The Nocturne in E flat of Chopin was played with real beauty and reach of melody, and though one can never quite forgive the vulgarization of the cadenza passages that a violin performance entails, we almost enjoyed even these. The Introduction and Tarantelle of Sarasate brought the official recital to a close, and then we had first, we think, a little more Sarasate; then such a performance of Mendelssohn's 'On Wings of Song' as showed conclusively what was music nearest of all to the heart of Heifetz; and lastly the 'Ruins of Athens' march past of Beethoven, which exposes the weakness of the violin in spectacular effects of any grandeur. In all these things Mr. Achron, at the piano, was a second self to him, and wholly shared the honours of the evening.

## *CHOPIN, THE BALLADES, FEBRUARY* 1923

ENGLISH criticism of the arts has often a smack of moral discipline, and the music of Chopin rarely comes off quite free from its strictures. It is held to be sentimental, effeminate, morbidly melancholy, and otherwise pathological, while its vital energy and nobility are, in comparison, ignored. Yet no composer for the pianoforte can rival Chopin in genuine popularity, and if a census could be taken of the hours spent in the study of Chopin's music it would be found that the ambition to play Chopin well is the first ambition of most pianoforte students. Technically, his music is still the model of what writing for the instrument should be, and his close on 200 works, polished as they are to the utmost refinement of technical clarity, purity, and complexity, are a labour of genius for a consumptive man which must compel admiration.

Yet, while the illness of Chopin made his achievement the more heroic, even the lover of Chopin will find other traces of its influence in his music. In some few of his earliest works, and even in his earliest works generally, there is a brightness of healthful exhilaration which his maturer works did not maintain. The well-known Polonaise in E flat with orchestra, which was once the battle-piece of every aspiring pianist, shows this early brilliance at its fullest development. Soon it was to give way to a nobility and

solemnity, barbed with a poignancy, not to be found elsewhere in pianoforte music. These qualities were to be developed, with increasing grandeur, throughout his life. But in his latest compositions there is to be found, again, a shrouding or veiling of these qualities, softening their boldness and leading sometimes to a kind of obscurity which has kept some of these compositions in the background until the exhaustive study of the composer at last forces them to the general knowledge. The Barcarolle may be cited as perhaps the loveliest of the pieces which inhabit this gloom, and the last of the four great ballades is also subdued by its shade. These pieces would be ruined by an over-brilliant or garish performance, such as is essential to Liszt. Liszt, it will be remembered, objected strongly to the Polonaise Fantasia, which was Chopin's most obscure composition among these later works. That these works show the touch of death can scarcely be doubted. Chopin has been classified as an elegiac writer, and his purely legato style lends some colour to the description. While it is too narrow, it is worth remembering in connexion with other romantic and poetic traits of the composer's music. Elegiac romance was, indeed, the peculiar field of the composer. His nationalism took a strong tone of elegy and lament, ennobled by pride. Even his polonaises and scherzos rise to the grandeur of elegiac ballads.

The four ballades themselves set the note for these high moods and are among the noblest of all Chopin's music. The 'ballade' in music must not be associated in too narrow a sense with traditional ballad poetry. The freedom of music has given it a much wider scope. Herder's translations from the northern ballads probably influenced Brahms, one of whose pianoforte ballads needs no title to be known specifically as an 'Edward' ballad. But most musical ballads are works of a more comprehensive legendary character. If they are national it is usually in the more complete sense of setting forth the traditional ideal of national character. How closely the ballades of Chopin may be derived from Polish national melodies it is impossible for a Westerner to say, but as no information on this score has been made known it is probably a safe presumption that their melodies are original. But a melody of legendary

character and entrancing beauty is essential to the very idea of a ballade, and the ballades of Chopin are admirably furnished with them. The opening subject of the First Ballade is more a form of regretful cadence than an air, and the second melody, in E flat, which has a ravishing sweetness, also preserves its legendary style by a cadential form of phrase. The working out of this piece is of great richness and technical brilliance. The Second Ballade is the one which was played to Schumann by Chopin on the occasion of a personal visit. The first subject is the loveliest barcarolle melody in existence, with a delicious rocking movement in the harmony which completes the ravishment. A wild stormy movement takes it suddenly, and, after an alternate working of great majesty and impetuosity, the piece, which began in F, breaks off abruptly in A minor, with a tender return to the first theme. The breaking of a flower by the storm has been suggested as the subject of the ballade, but the beauty of the music surpasses any obvious poetic associations and makes them futile. The Third Ballade is the popular one in A flat, which has two most beautiful melodies, the first of great nobility and the second of great fascination and charm. They are skilfully intermingled with bravura passage work of hazardous and deceptive difficulty, in a climax as noble and as natural in construction as any to be found in music. The Fourth Ballade is more a direct lament, told at first in a melody that is like a speaking sigh. With the figuration of this melody we seem to enter the land of marvels once more, though the note of romantic lament is never broken in all the long and brilliant climax and coda. There is nothing more beautiful in the whole realm of pianoforte music than these ballades, and nothing more securely maintains the height of romantic and marvellous legend. Together they give a sense of Poland's grandeur which nothing but music could express, and if we link up with them, as all lovers of Chopin must do, the four scherzos which lift humour itself to romantic heights of pain and give to it also a legendary cast of grandeur, and the F minor Fantasia, which has a grandeur and solemnity of march rhythm sustained as gloriously as the romantic marvels of the ballades are sustained, we should be in no danger of belittling Chopin.

DEBUSSY'S first works gave merely the sense of refinement and freshness, and when on quitting the class of E. Guiraud at the Paris Conservatoire in 1884 he won the Rome prize with his scenic cantata 'L'Enfant Prodigue' there was little to proclaim the most revolutionary of modern French harmonists. In the setting of Rossetti's poem 'The Blessed Damozel', for female voices and orchestra, he found a subject and a medium of expression as exquisite as even his imagination could desire, and gave us a work unique in its refinement and delicacy. The fastidiousness of his imagination now turned itself to the invention of harmonic subtleties, and his keen musical sense and delicacy of ear being backed by a poetic sense of the picturesque, the development took the twofold form of a daring and exquisitely subtle exploitation of the natural harmonic sensibility in the possibilities of harmony, suggested by modern science, and in as exquisitely judicious concessions to poetic ideas and the sense of the picturesque as can be reflected in music. These developments made a gulf between Debussy and the classical tradition as understood by the Saint-Saëns school. Debussy's genius in this harmonic development has not only been vindicated by the acceptation and admiration of his own works but by the adhesion of a host of followers, whose work has made the modern French school the most significant of our day. By the unexampled popularity of his orchestral prelude on Mallarmé's 'Après-midi d'une Faune' Debussy has convinced the general ear of a sensuous colour and atmosphere in orchestral music of which it had not been merely unconscious but sceptical and even derisive. In the field of dramatic music the fastidious sensibility of Debussy has brought about an economy of means and a modesty of musical expression which, while essential to any sincere or true dramatic effect, were thought to be impossible of achievement. The subdued tones of Maeterlinck's drama 'Pelléas et Mélisande' provided him an ideal medium for a triumph which, though single and removed from every other achievement of its kind, stands alone to point the true way in the future development of dramatic music. Though less alone in the field of song, Debussy here also is one of the leaders in the true assimilation of song and speech, and in

the relation of lyric melody to the instrumental, harmonic, and poetic fancy.

Incidentally, Debussy is one of the few who know the true refinement and poetic nature of the pianoforte. Impressionism has never in his pianoforte accompaniments or solos degenerated to an impurity of line, or harmonic subtlety to harmonic vagueness or insecurity. No composer can in our age escape contact with the mechanical, and in his whole-tone scales and the mechanical passage-work derived from them Debussy has yielded to this force to a degree on which too much stress is laid. The coldness of the mechanical has its own uses and its own brilliance. In its application Debussy has, as in everything else, shown himself refined and judicious. Of all composers in our day Debussy has the finest aesthetic. He has left us a world of beautiful music, and his influence is the most fertile since that of Wagner.

## *BUSONI, JULY* 1924

FERRUCCIO BUSONI has died, not unexpectedly, at fifty-eight years of age, his life quite worn away by his labours for music. More, perhaps, than any other musician since Brahms he has won the respect and reverent devotion of musicians for the conduct of his artistic life. Unlike Brahms, he was a world-musician more than a national one, and was the pattern of the true cosmopolitan in music. In his blood he joined the two strongest streams of European musical culture. His father was an Italian, his mother partly of German descent; and this racial admixture made him free of the musical world.

Heine has written that in the arts, as in religion, grace is the one thing needful. By this judgement of genius and its nature Busoni would meet with an insufficient appreciation, and it accounts, perhaps, for the undue neglect of his music. His music has not much of the charm which attracts easily, and though he does not want for worshippers, the worship he excites is of a sophisticated, and sometimes, it may be, mainly of a technical or professional nature. Many would rank him as the greatest pianist since Liszt,

but would be influenced in that judgement by their awe of his musicianship. He owed in this sense an allegiance to Liszt, and it is not the least of his services to music, and especially to the culture of his instrument, that in his later years he diligently collected from out-of-the-way places, and edited, the numerous works of Liszt which had never been well known. If an exhaustive edition of Liszt's works is ever completed, it will owe much to the labours of Busoni. More vital to Busoni's art than this adhesion to Liszt was his veneration for the works of Bach, from which he made many beautiful transcriptions, and which were a frequent pervading influence in his own works. From Bach and this creative emulation of Bach he reached the calmest uplands of his own nature, and probably sacrificed to these high feelings and consolations something of whatever animation, charm, and forthright appeal nature had endowed him with.

From this emulation of Bach came also some characteristic features of his pianoforte technique. In the search for calm he cultivated an evenness of tone and of movement more characteristic of the organ than of the pianoforte. His playing, so to speak, was often registered in blocks of even movement, like the movement of organ tone. One could not but suspect that in much of his instrumental music he worked, like Bach himself, by what we may call derived ideas. A process of reasoning might be necessary to find the true source of his expression.

In his visits to Manchester Busoni seemed attracted by powerful personalities, such as Richter, Brodsky, and, earlier, William Dayas. Some notion of what terrific things the analytical notes on music might become if composers condescended to tell us all their mind was once shown in the notes by Dayas to a sonata for violin and piano by Busoni, played at a Brodsky Concert by Dr. Brodsky and the composer. No wonder, if such thoughts were in Busoni's mind, that the power of climax in this outwardly calm music was tremendous. It was held by Rubinstein that if a man would compose he should not make too great haste to run hither and thither through the world of other men's music; and some fine composers, such as Delius, for instance, have shown an almost incredible in-

difference to the music of other great writers. Busoni ranged everywhere and brought back perhaps things which overwhelmed his original ways and moods; yet he contrived to find in composition a refuge from the outside world and to bestow by his works on many musicians consolations as removed and unassailable. He had also, for all his search for what was naive, a humour of alertness, zest, and intellectuality. His research and intellectual curiosity about music and its technique were insatiable. The traits of his method were so marked that his scholars and scholars' scholars, of which we had a powerful group in Manchester under Petri, made the method almost a madness. Yet Busoni was no method-worshipper, and once wrote that whoever was able to do anything worth while at the piano was also able to teach himself how to do it. He was so far a believer in the breaking up of our present musical system that he wrote a book forecasting the use of quarter-tones, though we do not know that he ever in his own work exemplified any such futuristic system.

In opera he made ambitious attempts, though his work in this field has not yet reached our English opera-houses. Abroad it is held in some esteem. In opera he promulgated ideas, not post-Wagnerian, but derived rather from Mozart. He saw in the work of Mozart a certain relation between the symphonic working out and the ensemble of opera, and it was in the further development of this idea that he saw the future of opera. He sought to establish in this way the identity of the symphonic and the operatic idea.

He died, we are told, with his musical drama of 'Dr. Faust' wet under his pen; and if to be insatiable in the pursuit of musical culture is to be faithful to the Faustian conception of life, then that fidelity has never been more finely exemplified than in the life of Ferruccio Busoni.

## *PADEREWSKI, OCTOBER* 1926

AFTER giving a Chopin recital in Liverpool in the afternoon Paderewski was welcomed in Manchester, and gave an exacting programme from the severer masters of the instrument.

Perhaps nothing was more remarkable about the recital than its absolute artistic rectitude, for during the whole of his programme Paderewski neither turned to the right hand nor to the left to make an effect here or to take a licence there, but with a scrupulous fidelity to the great composers whom he was interpreting seemed hardly conscious of any other presence than their own. A keen lyricism is the master key to his interpretations, but, to one who had heard him play the bulk of his programme a quarter of a century ago, a ripe easefulness and reflectiveness seemed almost to make his playing on this occasion leisurely, so amply did he find room for himself in all his impetuous song. He began the Bach Fantasie almost slowly, but it was splendidly strung on the instrument, and soon the impetuous rising passages and the grand arpeggios wrought on the listener's mind a fine pulsation. Paderewski took the broader method of the Bülow interpretation instead of the more rapid and fussy arpeggios made fashionable by Mendelssohn, and he began the arpeggio sequence with grandeur and deliberation. He made long dominant pauses, and one especially long before the poignant recitative section. Rugged strength sank down to as masterly a tenderness and pathos. He took also the Bülow reading of the answer to the fugue subject, preserving the rhythm and outline of the melody by commencing on the supertonic, though there are features in the later development of the fugue which suggest by their working that Bach must have reconciled himself to the altered rhythm in the answer. But on the score that the first chromatic ascent implies a modulation, the strictly chromatic answer adopted seems to our judgement both justifiable and essential. The fugue has also another unusual technical feature in promising at first a strict counter-subject which is shortly afterwards abandoned for a completely free treatment. Possibly the unusual method is adopted to give importance to certain passages and figures which later come strongly into the working, though the strict usage is abandoned to give variety with a small number of parts. Bach is the master of rules, but not their slave. Yet, free and unrestrained as the whole composition is, it was played by Paderewski so much in the manner of one creating it that the

view of music that would make it as so many planets singing together on their divinely appointed way received a striking illustration and vindication in its performance.

The last sonata of Beethoven offers surely the most striking illustration there is of that unity in seeming contrast which is the secret of the highest genius. Here is nothing, apparently, but a grim contrast between the starkest tragedy and that calm and eternal faith which is its only healer. Somewhere, in the soul of this music's creator, those elements are reconciled and fused. He tells us little of the process, but only its results. The final variations approach so nearly to a mechanical perfection that the contemplation of its nearness almost brings a shudder to the mind. Yet where shall we find music more divinely separated from the mechanical than those first variations whose whole existence seems to be the blissful stirring of an inward life? One acute member of the audience made the remark that he had never before heard these variations worked out with an absolute logic which made them really clear and understandable to the listener. It was a prosaic but far-reaching compliment. It spoke of an intellectual restraint as remarkable as the emotional power which was needed to follow and maintain those various transitions and ranges of emotion for the height and parallel of which we could go nowhere in poetry but to the 'Paradiso' of Dante. We have likened that apotheosis of the shake with which this sonata and other of Beethoven's later sonatas end, and in which the whole mechanical construction and subtlety of this sonata finds its solution, to those studies of light with which Turner in his last years baffled his beholders. The comparison is not far-fetched, nor yet the comparison with the moving glass, the smoothest of all poetic rhythms, in which Dante turns his divine verse. What can we say in praise of such perfect labour and inspired toil as Paderewski has expended in his lifetime on these variations? The 'Carnaval' of Schumann has, we have read, been performed fifty-seven times by well-known recitalists in New York during the past concert season. In writing to Moscheles when this book of pieces was first composed Schumann said: 'They are of no artistic value whatever.' The subsequent estimate of the world seems to

indicate that little things may be as precious in their way as the most mighty works. Schumann also claims that the characteristic titles of the pieces were only thought of, and added, after the compositions were finished. Lord, how shy folk were in those days lest it should be thought that anything extraneous to music went to the making of music! What a blessing it would be in these days if we could restore ever so little of this feeling! How often is not some commonplace tag of poetry or poetic suggestion made the very high road to banality! But Schumann, with his 'Papillons' and 'Carnaval', had done more than he thought, and had not only written living and lasting music but had lit a new torch in the musical world. His noble and warm harmonies have enriched the whole tissue of music. No wonder that Joachim could speak of him as a 'young man who is writing with a golden pen'. The 'Carnaval' was Paderewski's most popular success at this concert. He has always made Schumann a strong and definite figure in his recitals—next, always, to the great classics and to Chopin. Perhaps he has given him a strength and largeness of mien even beyond his deserts. But Schumann is not a composer whose stature is to be dwarfed to the miscellaneous aspect of his works. There is something latent in them which this view altogether fails to plumb.

Chopin, in the selection Paderewski gave from him, was less adequately represented, and we must wait until Saturday week for a full representation of him. The lovely subject and lovelier chain of shakes in the B major Nocturne, the beautifully poised middle section, and the subtle tenderness of the coda; the dramatic pianissimos of the Polonaise, and the rhythmical and sonorous brilliance of the Valse, even with the C sharp minor Valse added, did not exhaust him. The Nocturne by Schelling, written as a sort of landscape from the mountains, minarets, and bells of Dalmatia, was clever in its technique and texture, and had both a poetic and pianistic value. The Sketch by Stojosky was more obvious. The Rhapsody of Liszt was the most poetic and technically elaborate of the whole series, and was a fitting close to a recital which opened with the rhapsodic Bach Fantasia. The beautifully

shaded and melodic Nocturne from his own pen, which Paderewski had played in Manchester a quarter of a century ago, and an Impromptu by Schubert completed the encore pieces.

## *PADEREWSKI AND CHOPIN, OCTOBER* 1926

PADEREWSKI has given his first all-Chopin recital in Manchester. There have been ventures in the kind by our Manchester players; but this recital will carry the mind back to the famous last appearance of Rubinstein in Manchester, when, with an all-Chopin programme, he overwhelmed the many but scandalized the few who represented the classical purists of musical Manchester in those days.

A century ago Chopin was a young man of sixteen about to devote himself entirely to music. The century has brought his music a popularity entirely unexampled among keyboard composers. If houses could talk, what a tale they would have to tell, of what thousands of hours, months, and years spent by the most ambitious students, down through every type of less and less serious dilettante, in the study of his music. And the one thing which all these players have had in common is that they have been drawn to Chopin as the moth is drawn to the candle. Chopin has been an intoxication to them all. It follows from this madness that, while Chopin has never wanted admiration and love, his music has also never been without people to abuse it. This abuse has been even more prevalent in England than elsewhere, for no people is more given to subjecting its serious artistic delights to a moral inquisition, and unless a work of art will incontestably discipline the soul, our sternest critics can find but little use for it. When Rubinstein gave his great Chopin recital in Manchester about forty years ago it provoked a censorious correspondence in the papers, it being contended that to devote a whole evening to a composer of such little moral fibre was a danger to the art of music. Mr. Edward Hecht, then, in every sense, Hallé's right-hand man, very effectually closed the correspondence by pointing out that as writers for the keyboard

there were only three men that mattered, three real classics—Bach, Beethoven, and Chopin.

Chopin has still his countless admirers, or rather worshippers, to-day, yet it still holds that his music is deprecated while it is praised, because, it is said, of its sentimentality and want of moral fibre. The first answer to this accusation is that keenness and sentimentality cannot live together, and that Chopin is the keenest and most poignant of all composers who have written for the pianoforte. Sentimentality is known by its heaviness and its want of melodic and rhythmical flight. There is languor in Chopin, it is true, and the keenness of his melodic flight is often broken by the poignant delays which are as eloquent of emotion as the flight of the melody itself. But where shall we find rhythm like Chopin's in the intensity of melodic poise and movement? This rhythmical poise is a madness with him. He has written songs which are no songs but to the voice impossible, because they are imbued with the melodic flight which is the soul of the pianoforte. But in its true medium his melody is swift, poignant, tragic, and incomparable. And with what a perfection of technical accomplishment it is barbed! The rapidity and venom of the B flat minor Prelude and the tragic passion of the D minor Prelude are unique. It is the fashion to say that his sonatas are no sonatas, and therefore a failure. Is not the Funeral March Sonata among the greatest tragic works written for the pianoforte? Is not that enough? Is it nothing that the movements are each born of a living poetic thought? Are we to regard the middle melody of the Funeral March as sickly, while we regard Mozart's 'Dove sono', which uses the same means of suggesting solitude and distance, as classical? Is not the sense of the wind-swept graveyard in the final unison movement both poetic and unique? Where do tragic spirits throng more unmistakably than in the terrific scherzo? And all these things are presented with a technical perfection unrivalled, which is in itself a luxury to feel. Chopin is at once the most mannered and the most original of composers. If a new minuet of Haydn, Mozart, or even Beethoven were found to-morrow no one would expect any real addition to our musical ideas. The style would be known. But if to those little Valses of

Chopin in D flat and C sharp minor, a third were to be added? What a gem of novelty might we not find! Who would dare to say it might be thus or thus? Or a new nocturne? Supposing it were as original as the G major or the C minor Nocturne, what a miracle it would be! Can we say such things are mannered when our wildest dreams could not anticipate their nature? Then, if we come to the challenge of sheer nobility, can we speak of sentimentality when the nobility of Chopin's A flat Polonaise or A flat Ballade or that of the F minor Fantasia confronts us? The gibe is easy, but the successor to Chopin has not yet been found; nor is he likely to be.

## *BUSONI AND BEETHOVEN, DECEMBER* 1919

If the musicians of the world could be asked whom among them all they would most delight to honour they would answer with one voice 'Busoni'. Not on account of his genius, for the extent of that is more or less darkly hid from our judgement, but because he has been unremitting in labours which, more than those of any other man, raise our moral conception of the art. How much he has given to the art may be seen to-day by a glance at him. We have all aged by far more than the years between since Busoni was last heard in Manchester, and to-day we listen to him as sadder if not wiser men. It suits our ears that meanwhile Busoni has passed from the 'Tristan' to the 'Parsifal' stage as an interpreter of music, and his playing has become, above all, rich in the pathos of reflection and searching in that ultimate refinement of the imagination which is the saddest as it is the purest and most exquisite of mortal things. The normal prime of a pianist, in the purely technical sense, is understood to be not later than the thirty-fifth year, and even Liszt, who played on until he was eighty, fought shy of ostentatious display quite early. That Busoni had still a resource and grandeur of execution quite extraordinary might be illustrated by the single fact that the descending staccato scales in rapid triplets set against the martial melody in the opening move-

ment were taken in octaves with such precision, discretion, and unassuming energy that the unwonted means employed to strengthen the composer's effect might almost have passed unnoticed. But while Busoni has still an abundant fund of energy, he no longer seeks to conquer by its means, but finds his strength in those fallings away and vanishings which are the most wonderful part of Beethoven's spiritual power. One might almost call it the sole aim of Beethoven's music to give such intimations of immortality. If he gathers strength it is not for its own sake, but to have those wonderful diminuendo and pianissimo effects in his power with which he surprises us and makes us ask what kind of beings we must be to feel ourselves so much touched by the mere passage and vanishing of sound.

The 'Emperor' Concerto is full of such moments. Busoni played with all the composer's contempt for mere material effect. That sublime octave passage which trails out its ever-refining splendour with such awe-inspiring recedence in the opening movement is typical of the whole concerto. The air of the slow movement hardly makes a direct appeal, but we feel its passing like the passing of an august spirit. And what of the touching and exquisitely pointed delaying figure which waits on it, clutching, as it were, at the harmonies as they pass? Is not that a very echo to the heart which is under the power of such imaginings? What of the heart-spent shakes which come ere the close, and the last descent of this marvellous movement? Who would not give a lifetime of labour to play, just for once, as Busoni played them, the low B major chords which close those reluctant arpeggios?

Busoni has given much of his life to Bach, and he chose very modestly as his second solo that composer's very early 'Sonata Capriccio' (on the departure of a brother), a curiously solemn little bit of youthful programme music, in which melodic figures to which the composer remained attached during the whole of his life are for the first time brought into play. The realism of the postilion's horn is blended, or contrasted, with various kinds of affectionate and serious foreboding, in musical phrases which were developed in after years in the agony of the Saviour on the Cross

and other divine things in his greatest works. Busoni played this quaint work with a peculiar reverence, and added the Campanella Study of Liszt when recalled.

## *BUSONI AND MOZART, HALLÉ CONCERT, FEBRUARY* 1921

BUSONI is a performer who has ranged through the world of music, but we think this was the first time he had appeared as the interpreter of Mozart in Manchester. The challenge of Mozart's music is known to every accomplished musician as not so much one of interpretation as of a certain ravishment of execution. To snatch a grace beyond the reach of art is always the problem which seems to allure the player, and the true interpretation is more like a continual discovery of grace and sensibility than anything that can really be called by the name of expression. Probably the fine player never plays so well as in Mozart, or so much delights in his own playing as when playing this composer. Taking this felicity of execution as the true stamp of Mozart playing, it may be said that Busoni's playing had too much of purpose, forethought, and poetic imagination. It did not lack delicacy, nor fancy, nor waywardness, nor felicity, for it refined upon all these things in a sharp, microscopic way, which was a revelation at every turn, and which yet imposed a severity and greatness upon them, and added a poignancy beyond what their artlessness could yield. If we wanted their unalloyed felicity it was cast like a spell from the example of Busoni's own passage work on the execution and style of the wood-wind players, for whose instruments Mozart in this concerto has written many supremely beautiful interludes after his own inimitable manner. Busoni brought out also those stronger traits of the work which seem to have fired the emulation of Beethoven in the opening manner and challenging chords of his own E flat Concerto and in the general style of the finale from the E flat Quintet for pianoforte and wind instruments. The middle section of Mozart's finale will remind the listener pleasantly of an air in minuet rhythm sometimes heard in 'The Marriage of Figaro'.

The slow movement in its brevity and portentous sadness takes us back almost to the manner of Bach. It is a work full of good things rather than of an essential unity. The cadenzas added by Busoni were both of well-packed artifice and of natural melodic beauty, and they not only reconciled the listener to these edifices of the executive art, but showed us the art for once in an acceptable and living guise.

The 'Indian Fantasy' of Busoni is a work of a far different kind, and is chiefly remarkable for the way in which the barbarities of the Western Hemisphere have stimulated the composer's technical invention in the combination of instruments. It is ungracious to say hard things about an energy so all-devouring as that of Busoni, but one cannot help the regret that, as a composer, he has been led so far from himself, whether it has been to worship at the shrine of Bach or, as here, to bow the knee to idols which have less right to his worship. It is the fate of the world-faring artist oftener to lose his birthright and heritage than to find a kingdom. Busoni's case seems rather to emphasize this danger. No man has put so much labour into composition with a result so questionable. Whether the normal musician feels inspirited by such a case or no, he must in a sense be overwhelmed. It is no new thing that the world-experienced interprets the familiar thing in music in a forbidding way, and the thousand amateurs who have their ideas on the interpretation of Chopin's nocturnes would be little likely to cast their votes for Busoni's reading of the F sharp Nocturne. Experience has its disadvantages. But of the musicians, if the world cast their votes for a musician who had brought dignity to their art and its labours, Busoni might well head the poll.

## *MORITZ ROSENTHAL, JANUARY* 1921

MORITZ ROSENTHAL is not a king among pianists in any merely popular way. He is a purist among the purists of his instrument, and if he makes a sensational or popular impression it is only because he has so much technical ability left over after ful-

filling the severest demands of the purist style that he attains popularity in the hardest possible way. Though there is a look of pleasant suavity in his general bearing, Rosenthal while playing wears a look of almost pained fastidiousness, and in the expression of his playing this fastidiousness is never relaxed. His use of the sustaining pedal is more scrupulous than that of any other player in the world. In the long tarantella movement which closes Chopin's B minor Sonata he used this pedal throughout with an almost staccato shortness, allowing the bass only the most momentary thrill through the harmonies, and this reticence in the use of the pedal was characteristic of all his playing. His left foot also was for the most part thrown back and away from the pedals, after the way of most modern virtuosi, and only very rarely and deliberately did he use the left pedal to help the flashing and glistening pianissimo, the diamond clarity of which is the chief ornament of his technical style. These renunciations laid an enormous technical burden upon his fingers. Then, if Rosenthal is, on occasion, probably the most rapid of living players, there is nothing of bluff or chance in his swiftest flights. He is the most sparkling and the most deliberate of players. Amazingly animated in details on the whole, we yet found him once or twice guilty of comprehensive readings which diminished rather than enhanced the animation of the music. The drive down to the close of the scherzo in the sonata was a case in point, and in the ascending passage of semiquavers near the close of the final movement, where the composer's idea seems no more than an ornamented succession of chromatic major thirds, he sought out a likeness to the main theme of the movement which seemed far-fetched and had little of beauty or brilliance to recommend it. Both in the lovely melody of the slow movement and in the dazzling rapidity of the scherzo and finale the execution was everywhere as transparent as flawless. Few would expect in the C sharp major Prelude and Fugue of Bach any great originality of treatment, but Rosenthal, by exquisite mutations of fancy, made the changing tonalities of the prelude most eloquent of their formal relationship, and in the fugue made the formal treatment as fascinating in its beauty. The gavotte from Gluck's

'Orfeo', in the well-known arrangement by Brahms, was marked by a most tenderly rhythmical sentiment—a quality in which the cadences of Chopin's music were oftentimes made as exquisitely beautiful. In the 'Tabatière à Musique' by Liadow and Rosenthal's own 'Humoresque' on themes from Johann Strauss the refined punctiliousness of the player's art and fancy were put at the service of music intrinsically joyous and light-hearted, and the innate modesty of his masterly style appeared here also in the most gracious light. The lovely Chant-Polonais of Chopin, in an arrangement that might almost correctly be described as the player's own, so charmingly modified was it from that of Liszt, brought to an end a display which, from its purity of technique, was unique in our experience of pianists.

## *BACKHAUS, OCTOBER* 1922. I

WILHELM BACKHAUS had not appeared in Manchester since before the war, and his choice of Schubert's 'Wanderer' Fantasia as his opening solo at the Brand Lane Concert had an appropriateness to the occasion. The work is unique in its character, though one might associate with it the equally personal Fantasia in C by Schumann, which its challenge possibly inspired. Though the finest of Beethoven's sonatas usually have much of the fantasia in their nature, and gain their unity of form and idea from this suggestion, the 'Wanderer' Fantasia in C of Schubert is, of all compositions in this kind and scope, the most completely controlled by a single idea and motive. It is strangely typical of the composer, who seems to have nourished the idea of life as a wandering from an ideal home, throughout the whole of his days, and in much of his music, besides the rather sentimental song which bears the title of 'The Wanderer', indulges, though in higher and more heroic moods, the same strain of feeling.

The 'Wanderer' Fantasia seems born of a sudden impulse to lift one special strophe of the song from its mire of sentiment into a sphere of greater wildness and sublimity. It is a tempestuous work,

and music contains few things of greater pride than the transformed and tempestuous chordal insistence with which it so bravely opens. Schubert was not a man to turn aside from his musical imaginings, even in his most ambitious technical moments, to aggrandize technique by artificial invention. He wrote no concerto, and in this, the most difficult of his works, there is no single note that stoops to interest by technical invention, or which in technical artifice goes a whit beyond the technical practice of his forerunners. Yet what technical wealth he displays in the work! It is conceived in a tumult, and everywhere the ideas come surging upon each other like an unbroken sea.

Backhaus played the work with an almost too comprehensive breadth of energy. He is not, for a player of his rank, a player of keen or tumultuous expression. His spaciousness softens the edge of feeling, and though, to use Shelley's phrase, he loosens out the notes in showers, as was superbly shown in the finale of the Second Liszt Rhapsody and the valse from Delibes so brilliantly arranged by Dohnanyi, given as his encore piece, the tempest of Schubert's music had in its languors too much of Schubertian mildness. Reflection had an ease not without a tinge of weariness. He managed the transition of the movements with great skill, obtaining the due pauses without endangering the silence with the risk of applause. But why, when the composer had written such a splendid opening, should Backhaus cheapen it by a prelude to establish the key? In the music of Liszt Backhaus found a more abounding scope for his technique. We have rarely heard the D flat Study played with more grandeur and sweep of harplike tones. The Second Rhapsody was not only finely harmonic in the control of its chordal rapidity, but in the touch and capriciousness of its melody. But novelty is a great enhancement of brilliance, and we found the best of all his playing to be in the Valse Fantasia from Delibes of Dohnanyi, given as a final encore. Here we could enjoy without let or hindrance the daring and caprice of both composer and player.

SCHUMANN once said about Beethoven that it did not matter a tinker's curse whether he began to write with a soulful or a purely technical aim; the result was always the same balanced perfection. Backhaus, in the Paganini Variations, brought us to the same kind of feeling about Brahms. For the first time we heard these variations played simply for the sake of the music. Brahms almost seems to confess to a purely technical aim in writing them. But, as Backhaus himself notes, after the first two variations, which are in a sense the inversion of each other, the composer brings something new and vital to each succeeding variation, and one is never in danger of relapsing to the idea that Paganini and not Brahms is the genius behind the music. The contrary he held to be the truth with regard to the much admired variations of Reger in B minor on a theme by Bach. They were splendid to play, but somewhat less inspiring to listen to, yet as each variation contrived to bring in some touch of the original melody it had also the power to haunt the mind. Such was the genius of Bach. What haunted us in the Paganini Variations was not the genius of Paganini. Paganini provided only the skeleton; the flesh and the life were Brahms. We felt that this fine compliment to Brahms might be quite fairly shared by Backhaus himself. He showed an instantaneous power to bring something forceful and vital to the elucidation of each succeeding variation. It has often been remarked about Beethoven that any attempt to read him in a comprehensive bravura brings him from his height down toward the level of other folk. Brahms gained tremendously in power by the comprehensive reading and handling of Backhaus. The mingling of rhythms, which are often borne along on the broad stream of bravura execution, came out in a supremely natural way, and what we may call the drunken daring of the composer, in letting the rhythms go their several ways so forcefully while they are individually more or less independent of the beat, was an extravagance that appeared only the most natural thing in the world.

Backhaus has the side fling of the hand which makes light of all intervals and distances on the keyboard developed to a point of

rapidity and certainty that arouse a continual wonder. We are not sure that the composer always gains by its combination of rapidity and strength. The gaps, for instance, in the E flat Prelude of Chopin, when traversed with such rapidity as they are by Backhaus, lose in some degree the sense of hazard and flight which animates them. Backhaus brought other listeners besides ourself to think him possibly the greatest of all pianists now before the public. If a doubt was left in the mind it was whether the sense of flight in such large skips had in his playing the same vividness that we had found in the playing of a Rubinstein, a Paderewski, a Eugen d'Albert, and one or two other players. There is a point at which dexterity begins to defeat its own ends. Yet when one hears Backhaus perform, say, the 'Campanella' study of Liszt, where the composer has set himself to make the utmost of rapidity in hazardous intervals, one cannot do less than think him a supreme master. He played the G sharp minor study of Chopin at a dazzling speed; also the chromatic study in A minor, the second of the first book. This last brought back the memory of the boy Backhaus playing it once in velvet knickerbockers at the Gewandhaus concerts. One may express the doubt whether it had not then a more subtle poignancy than his more rapid and superb execution of to-day. True, the metronome marks of the composer seem to license the most extreme speed. Yet we have our doubts about the ultimate identity of speed and the sharp poignancy which is Chopin. Backhaus has always made delightful arrangements of music for his own use, and he played the Romance from Chopin's E minor Concerto, doubling the figuration in the right hand, and taking the melody and string quartet parts in the left, also bringing in the lovely clarinet solo. He gave also his once improvized arrangement of the 'Don Juan' Serenade by Mozart. A Tango, very quiet and sentimental and really beautiful, arranged by Godowsky, from Albeniz, and the 'Bird Song' of Palmgren were among the delicious trifles of his recital. The Sonata 'Appassionata' of Beethoven was its gorgeously romantic opening. Backhaus did everything well; so well that admiration is hard put to it where to begin or where to end.

## *MOISEIWITSCH, FEBRUARY* 1922

A FINE work will generally bear a number of fine readings, if only each interpreter brings something of himself to the work, and the Concerto in B flat minor by Tchaikovsky is so far abnormal in its technical demands that on technical grounds alone it separates even the finest players a good deal, and the best are shown to be only part masters of the field. Siloti only a few weeks ago gave us a reading rich in musical fullness and ease; Moiseiwitsch gave us a reading of high-mettled slenderness, tinged with a lofty and yet delicate melancholy. Both readings had the advantage of a decisively Russian character, yet, given that character, could hardly have been more distinct. Siloti stands for a generation in which even to play the concerto at all was a distinction, and as a personal friend of the composer his reading has a certain authenticity. Moiseiwitsch belongs to a generation in which every serious student has the concerto among his pieces, and, as an instance of the rifts which run across musical tradition and culture in our day, it may be mentioned that he has never even heard Siloti play. His reading is one that follows quite logically from his own musical sensibility and superb technique. Probably no one who heard his reading had ever heard the concerto played with such refinement and delicacy of figuration. In England there is a sort of fashion that the lyrical matter in the concerto, and especially the second subject of the last movement, should be vulgarized not a little and the whole work be conceived as appealing greatly to the popular ear. Moiseiwitsch seems to trouble himself little with such ideas. The piece holds him artistically from the first note to the last, and he goes off quite dreamily and self-occupied into its most dangerous themes. He is of such slight build that the concerto is still to him not merely an artistic but an athletic feat, and one which it is a great triumph of the artistic spirit to control. But Moiseiwitsch is musically an athlete with whom athleticism itself has the refinement and the delicacy of an art. He gives an impression of sensibility in the very doing of his musical task. Whether the interpretation is a thing separately conceived or merely the perfection of his finely calculated execution does not seem in his case greatly to matter.

The immediate musical sensibility seems as much the source of his technique as of his fancy. To find a parallel for our admiration we must go to the art of the insect, where alone artifice seems to have the same perfection of design. But with all this perfection there was also something poetic. The melody fell, not merely with grace, but with an exquisite and fragile melancholy; the very figuration had intensity of utterance, like the intensity of the harp when most exquisitely played. There was somnolence, too, without lethargy in the dreamlike poise of the rocking melody and lulling figures of the slow movement. If the music missed anything of its greatness you were hardly conscious of the loss. At the very sight of Ravel's music you call aloud for such a player as Moiseiwitsch. Here the composer's own fancy is meticulous. He is a fine spinner, in whom art and artifice are almost one. We felt some little want of substance in the 'Jeux d'Eau', and in the middle section we thought the line of melodic interest was too single, and kept too purely in the right hand. There were exquisite mutations of treatment in Chopin's C sharp minor Valse; and though we have heard the B flat Rhapsody of Liszt given with more impulse and grandeur, we doubt whether we have ever heard it given quite so quickly in the closing octave movement.

## *CORTOT, DECEMBER* 1919

Although in the judgement of the orchestral players Cortot had on Tuesday given in Rachmaninoff's Third Concerto one of the most brilliant concerto performances heard for many years at the Liverpool Philharmonic Concerts, the audience for his recital on Saturday afternoon in the same Philharmonic Hall was by no means representative of the city. Yet there was just a fair audience, and Cortot may pride himself in the comparison with that of Rubinstein, who when giving his historical recitals performed five representative sonatas of Beethoven to an audience so small that when settled in the train on leaving his first remark was 'I will never go to that village again'. Cortot had played in Man-

chester under great difficulties, and it was at once seen, in the opening pieces by César Franck, which were the sole repetition of the recital, that he was in much finer mood, the widely expanded chords of the chorale having far more solemnity and grandeur, the climax of the fugue having a more fantastic flight, and the epilogue which returns so beautifully to the chorale being given with such exquisitely softened tones that the whole must remain in the mind as one of our imperishable musical experiences. The twelve studies selected from the two books of Chopin showed Cortot as most wonderful in those which had the most exquisite rapidity and lightness. All the many subtleties of modulated touch and phrasing which in the routine readings pass for nothing were found to be as practicable to the right player as they were original and fascinating when accomplished. The rarely played A flat Study from opus 10, the F major Study from opus 25, and the two G flat Studies were in this vein of exquisite brilliance and were all perfect.

Like other great players, Cortot hardly succeeded in combining sufficient energy of movement with his rapidity to make the left hand of the C minor, or 'Revolutionary', Study fulfil one's idea of it. The great A minor Study had more sublimity, and was mastered with a systematic composure of technique amazing in its nonchalance. The Twelve Preludes (Book I) of Debussy were a more untried venture, and they showed the complete adaptability of Cortot's technique to the aloofness, the plasticity, and the harmonic shading demanded by these perhaps more picturesque and impressionistic than musical compositions. There was no routine coldness in the style, and for the first time in our experience the popular prelude 'La fille aux cheveux de lin' had something like a real warmth of affection and tenderness in it. 'La Cathédrale engloutie' stood out as the great piece of the series. It has, indeed, done something to enlarge the style of pianoforte playing, with its effects of mass and of shade, which have a type of sublimity new to the instrument. The sense of depth, altitude, and of distance are also brought to the ear in a new way in many of the preludes, especially in this piece and in 'Des pas sur la neige'. One felt at once when Cortot turned to the 'Carnaval' of Schumann that

he had carried only too much of this plastic art with him, and that the opening 'Preamble' was something too much carved out of stone, and had too little spontaneity and humour of the genial kind. There were noble and fascinating things enough to lift the performance far above ordinary levels, but the fascinating moments were rather gleams than a continuous romantic joy or intoxication such as the music in thoroughly sympathetic hands of equal mastery might have conveyed.

## *PACHMANN, NOVEMBER* 1925

PACHMANN was in good vein for his recital at the Brand Lane Concerts, and played more finely than he has done here for some years. It was mainly in his additional pieces that his greatest skill was shown, and possibly it was his good fortune in coming off so well in pieces of rapid execution that disposed him to extend his recital so far. It is almost forty-two years since he first played in Manchester at the Hallé Concerts, on January 3, 1884, when he played Chopin's F minor Concerto, the Barcarolle, and other pieces. Our own first recollection of him is at his second appearance a year later, when he played Mozart's D minor Concerto as it has never been played since, with an irresistible animation which seemed to beam not only from the music but from his whole being. Never, surely, did a player appear at the concerts who was so openly and graciously delighted with himself. He ended with a performance of Henselt's study 'Si oiseau j'étais', which made this piece the most popular of all pianoforte pieces for many a long day, and which still remains, in our own mind, as a performance that has never been at all nearly approached. The notes seemed absolutely to be borne up by the air and to have had no material being whatever. Pachmann has always been unquestionably among the greatest pianists in the world; yet hardly among the world's greatest interpreters of music. He himself, in his moments of ecstasy, has always pointed to his fingers as the secret of his magic; and there is no need for the world to quarrel with the verdict. He has always

been one of the first purists of his instrument, and has been almost first a lover of the pianoforte, and a lover of music afterwards. 'If I played it like the rest I would not play at all,' he said of something on Saturday, and it is in this extreme conscientiousness of the exacting purist that he plays everything. He was opening out the great C minor Fantasia of Mozart with an awe-inspired loveliness of tone. 'Now listen to my left *tumultuoso*,' he exclaimed; but it was no more than a capricious tumult that Pachmann made, and one remembered how the great Rubinstein had thundered out these left-hand tones from the very spot where Pachmann was now playing. But Pachmann kept a Mozartean loveliness throughout, and as the music is of such beauty that nothing better could be chosen for the farewell to an instrument, one could be content to be carried no farther than its liveliness carried one. The main part of the Chopin pieces were small, but at the end there came the B flat minor Scherzo, 'the best of all', as Pachmann put it, and in this superb work Pachmann at once rose to greater heights. As a feat of velocity and polished execution it was astonishing. Careering along to the end of the working out, he cried, 'So-and-so took it like this, and Liszt at this tempo.' One might venture to think that Liszt would also have kept a fuller energy in the bass, but Pachmann had made a splendid climax in one of the most difficult of all Chopin's pieces.

He began his encores with the little D flat Valse, indulging his favourite ninths in the left hand, which are a fastidious addition of which Chopin himself might have been proud. Then came a little Barcarolle of Henselt, also with charming additions from his own hand, and then the pianoforte was closed. Yet he came back after a while and gave the little-played B major Nocturne. Then came a dazzling performance of the 'Black Note' study with the middle section given in a marvellous lyrical manner, and the final octaves taken in contrary motion. It was this piece also, we think, which he enriched in the harmonies by a superbly sustained ninth—a real stroke of genius. Then he went back to the favourites of days gone by—the E flat Rondo of Weber, which he played with marvellous vigour and velocity. Could any other player in the world have

equalled this feat to-day? Not satisfied with this triumph he went on to the 'Rigoletto' fantasia of Liszt, strewing the notes of the cadenza passages around him with a true Oriental lavishness. One began to forget his age, for he had worked himself into a sort of youth once more, and his opulence and rapidity of execution enabled one to sense the true Pachmann, the exhaustless genius of the piano. We had almost forgotten what we thought was the greatest musical feat of the recital. Few would associate Pachmann with Brahms, yet it was in the composer's rugged 'Rhapsody' in B minor that we found him wrestling, and that quite triumphantly, with heroic ideas. He played the purist here, too, and we should not have guessed, from the satisfying result, that Brahms was, as Liszt said, the worst of all pianoforte writers.

## *BAUER, NOVEMBER* 1922

THE arrangement of the programme for this Hallé Concert was exceedingly good, and materially helped both the enjoyment and the understanding of the listener. The concert began with the G major 'Brandenburg' Concerto of Bach, and thence we slipped into a delightful Concerto of Mozart, played by Harold Bauer and the orchestra with all possible sympathy with the elements of the antique in its style, and thence again we went to the Suite of Strauss—half mockery, but all love of the ancient manner—'Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme', from the introductory act of 'Ariadne in Naxos'.

Bauer played in a style which had so much fundamental brainwork that every player on the platform was, so to speak, put wise by the intellectual qualities of his playing, and the listener's part was no more difficult than the enjoyment of daylight. Mozart is so much like open daylight himself that sensibility does more than brains towards a true interpretation of his music, but César Franck is in a different case, and his Symphonic Variations owed so much to Bauer's perspicuity of style that the intellectual fullness and clarity of the music became a thing of wonder,

so many features of deliberate expression and beauty were revealed. This work even was as little laboured and burdensome as might be, for Bauer showed the most piercing knowledge of what was essential to make his part tell and to inform also the orchestral expression, and he created a fascinating brilliance from the least possible amount of tone. Nowhere had we any taint of the brilliance which would overwhelm by offending the ear, but everywhere a purely musical strength and charm. Even such a rag of a piece as the Study in D flat of Liszt has become, by so many ineffectual fingerings, was transformed under his fingers into a thing of exquisite judgement and variety. What a lovely bell-like melody floated over the swaying sea of harp-like tones! How exquisite an instrument the pianoforte is when handled with this judgement and purity was made apparent when Bauer, after a sea of mingled tones, raised his hands and left only the finely blended harmonics of the open strings to sound. The listener could appreciate then all the fascination the sustaining pedal has for the devoted pianist. And what a tribute this ravishing sound was to the impeccability and instinctive judgement of Bauer's style! We have had no playing of this masterly purity on our Manchester concert platform for many years, for though Moiseiwitsch played with the same finish he had by no means the same range of tone, and range of tone is essential to its perfect blending and harmony. What delicacy the music of Mozart had under Bauer's handling may be judged from this praise. His playing was a perfect setting for the wonderful interludes in which the wood-wind instruments of the orchestra become such a nest of eloquent singing-birds. Bauer found also the languishment and tender poignancy of Mozart, both in his melody and in the manifold harmony among which it is set. The exquisite performance of Mozart's Concerto (No. 5 in A major), both by soloist and orchestra, gave a line by which it might be seen that the music of Bach, previously heard, had been over-accentuated. Accent is the child of prose in music. One is almost tempted to say that nothing can need an accent, so true is it that the melodic flow, or gait, or sweep of music should provide all the accent necessary.

String Quartet, Op. 67, in B flat.
Quintet for Clarinet and Strings, Op. 115, in B minor.
Sextet for Strings, Op. 18, in B flat.

THE Brahms's concert by Miss Edith Robinson and her colleagues was without pianoforte, and a crescendo of instruments was obtained by means of a string quartet, a quintet with clarinet, and a sextet with extra viola and violoncello. The concert illustrated that by increasing the family of his instruments, Brahms, like Bach, only increases the evidence of his mastery. Mr. Harry Mortimer played the Clarinet Quintet in B minor with that delicious delicacy and refinement which we have come to regard as the essence of all his playing. The tone of the strings in the opening quartet had been somewhat dry and of less sensuous charm than in the concert of Monday. Mr. Mortimer brought a melting influence into the music, and the winding beauty of the melodies, which in this work have a unique poignancy and tenderness, helped also to banish the hardness of the string tone. The clarinet is soon brought to a fight with the strings, and if to a fight, then to discomfiture; and certain forte passages lost for a moment their delight from this cause. But the wood-wind instrument generally exercised a soothing spell and brought a softness of tone which the first work had lacked. Mr. Carl Fuchs as first 'cello, and Mr. Stuart Redfern as second viola, came into the ensemble for the Sextet in B flat which closed the concert, and Mr. Fuchs especially played the many beautiful solos for his instrument with such warmth and refined intensity that the whole work was made genial and youthful. It had brought us back at a bound from the closing stages of the composer's life to a point sufficiently near its beginning for the warm blood of youth to flow through the music, quickening the veins of melody and loosening those joints of an appropriated Beethovenish style which are apparent in the set contours of the music. These concerts no more than the Beethoven concerts of the Lener Quartet give any colour at all to the theory that great works should be heard in silence from end to end. The audience became quite noisy between the movements in the latter part of

the concert, and at the end the six players were long and loudly applauded.

That Mr. Fuchs should by his participation have brought so much youth into the music was, we believe, a point that gave great satisfaction to the experienced listeners of the audience. The concert might well set us asking what there was to be learned about youth and age in the music of Brahms. Everybody remembers Schumann's first enthusiasm about him, as a young giant about to run his course. But the youthful music of Brahms is in so many respects old, and wears such a weight of learning, that one thinks of him already as a composer who will transform romanticism once more into a classic guise. Musicians have not always felt even his first music as warm and flowing from the heart. Only of late years have they learnt to break down those seeming barriers of coldness and austerity which encased him. And such a performance as that of the sextet, in which it was taken for granted from the first that the music had a heart, and the streams of melody flowed on continuously like a river, only now makes the general listener aware that the music of Brahms flowed from him in an endless stream of full and natural melody from youth to age. How noble is the great variational ballad which forms the slow movement of this sextet! That is a folk-music the like of which is not to be found anywhere else. It turns folk-music to a classic grandeur and dignity. It has a sweep and breadth and a pride in its lowly inspiration and origin that goes as far as the best political theories to show us in what way men may be equal. And the grace of the last movement, in which all that is gracious in the closing movements of Beethoven is brought to the service of a large romantic melody that has the heart of Schumann in its fullness—how warm and mild its tone, and yet how noble its bearing! We do well to honour such music, and to love the genius and nobility of heart which went to its making. And when we find that the same man can write, when age has come and death approaches, music whose mildness of heart is not less perfect, whose tenderness is only enhanced, and whose art is finished with a beauty and patience which are a ravishment to the soul, our feelings of admiration are

more than doubled. When age approves of youth and both are bound together by the piety of such consistent, beautiful, and noble art, we may well admire the wonder of manhood.

## *THE LENER QUARTET AND BEETHOVEN, OCT.* 1925. I

BEETHOVEN is reported to have said, 'Whoever understands my music aright will be raised above every trouble of the world.' There is no need to inquire whether the report is true, for the statement is merely what is true about the sublime in art everywhere, which is known, for one thing, by its consoling power. That Beethoven is possibly the greatest master of the sublime in music is a fairly general conviction among musicians. That the sixteen quartets of Beethoven represent this sublimity in a peculiar way may be reasoned on two grounds. First, quartet-writing for strings imposes the utmost purity of style and line upon the composer; and, secondly, when Beethoven in his last years was removed effectually by deafness and other illness and by the austerity of his own thoughts both from the pleasures and the understanding of the world, he turned in a new spirit to the quartet and wrote such works as neither in feeling nor design had hitherto been attempted in music. It is true, then, that the later quartets of Beethoven are a music more removed from the world than any music there is.

Beethoven was born on December 16, 1770, and his first six quartets, known as opus 18, were written round about 1800. One of these six quartets will be given in each of the six concerts, in which the whole sixteen will be played, by the Lener Quartet of Budapest during this week and next. It is usual to divide Beethoven's work into three periods: the first, in which he worked chiefly within the framework of the style made by his predecessors Haydn and Mozart; the second, in which his genius broke all bounds, showing in each work a fundamental originality, remarkable singleness of idea, and a fullness of complete manhood and maturity; the third, in which there came first a strange gentleness and ravishing beauty, and later a crabbed determination and sublimity linked with a spirituality and tenderness that music had never hitherto known.

Of the quartets, the first six belong definitely to the first period; the next three, opus 59, known from their dedication as the Rasoumoffsky Quartets, belong as definitely to the second period, and are among his most glorious and happy works; the quartets in E flat (opus 74) and in F minor (opus 95) represent, the first the gentleness and the second the brusqueness of the transition stage; and the rest which follow from opus 127 to the end all come from the close of the last mysterious period. The last quartets, both from their length and their content, are more difficult for the listener than the rest, and for this consideration the quartets will not be given in their chronological sequence, but one work from each period will, as far as possible, be given at each concert.

The Quartet in C minor, which opens the series, was probably the last of the first six to be written, and as there is little sign of it in the note-book until the rest were fairly well written, probably it occupied the composer's mind less than any. It has both a scherzo and a minuet movement, though the scherzo is not the typical Beethoven movement to this title, but is a happy movement almost identical in lilt and type of melody with the allegretto from the First Symphony. The characteristic heavy sforzando of Beethoven is seen in the minuet theme. The last movement smacks very much of Haydn's joviality. There is no regular slow movement.

The second period proper is passed over at the first concert in favour of the Quartet in E flat, opus 74, a work of very delicate workmanship. The tender questioning phrase which ends on the flat seventh of the key at the opening of the introduction is often remarked upon as a curiosity, but it should be remembered that the natural form of an introduction is to beat the bounds of the key in order first that its effect should be fragmentary. The sinuous phrase of the first violin which opens the allegro proper is the most important theme. From the many broken pizzicato chords the quartet is often called the 'Harp' Quartet. The slow movement is a lovely melody, in the key of A flat, which Beethoven so often associates with ideas of sentiment and reflection. The presto which does duty as the scherzo movement gives in its theme a remarkable hint of the 'fate' theme from the C minor Symphony; and the con-

tinuation after the first double-bar has a still more remarkable likeness to that work. The C major Interlude to this movement has great originality of rhythmic design, and a boisterous joy which takes us right forward to the finale of the Choral Symphony. The coda, or transition from this movement to the naïve variational allegretto which ends the work, is of an enigmatic type, while the last movement itself looks forward to Schumann in its workmanship. The Quartet in C sharp minor is in a series of seven movements which should never come to an absolute pause, though the first four are more strictly connected than the rest. The quartet opens with a slow and poignant fugue, worked out with as poignant diminutions in the upper notes of the instruments. Then follows an Elysian sort of pastoral, in a key only a semitone higher. Next there is a short dramatic introduction, which leads to a series of blissful variations in A major, like short Elysian idylls, each one more rarefied than the last. The fascinating scherzo, inimitable in its fanciful humour, will hold under its spell the most sophisticated and the most unsophisticated ear. The last movement opens with yet another slow introduction, and then follows a wild dance allegro, in the original key, with a second theme which harks back to the original fugue subject of the quartet, which is now heard first in an inverted form.

## *THE LENER QUARTET AND BEETHOVEN.* II

Quartet in C minor, Op. 18, No. 4.
Quartet in E flat major, Op. 74.
Quartet in C sharp minor, Op. 131.

LAST night, to our mind, we heard for the first time the Lener Quartet in Manchester. It had played in the Free Trade Hall, where it was badly placed on the platform and its music was snowed under with heavy part-songs; and it had been heard in a hall where the acoustic is so unsympathetic that the music seemed to freeze our bones. In the Lesser Free Trade Hall the tone and the blend of their instruments were so admirable that we thought their concert was almost the most enjoyable chamber concert we

had ever heard in the city. The perfection of ensemble and the due sharing of the interest between the instruments were the great technical features of the playing. The tone was musical and full without being at any time harsh. We have never known a second violin to take such a helpful and judicious part in a quartet concert. If one instrument more than the others is reticent it is the violoncello, and we think it might be advantageous on this account if the instrument might by some means be raised a little from the floor and more to the level of the other instruments.

Of the three works given we thought the second, the 'Harp' Quartet in E flat, was the most perfect. The gradation of tone in the passages which ran through the instruments, whether they were bowed or plucked, was always beautiful in its delicacy of transition, and no two passages followed each other without some charming transition of tone colour. The speed of the scherzo movement was such that to the ear it did not always make good its true musical accentuation, but the execution was so entrancingly clear and rapid that one wondered whether it were not merely one's own ear and imagination which gave this false impression. In the great C sharp minor Quartet the richness of tone lent great poignancy of expression to the long notes of the opening, but we doubted whether the tone was sufficiently softened when, in the diminution of the subject, the instruments are used at a higher altitude. The cradled rhythm of the short dances and variations was also possibly sacrificed a little to fullness of tone. The quartet had been playing throughout last week in a large hall at Glasgow, and to their own ears the players last night found the tone overpowering. That might be the first cause of their great general success, and yet also the explanation of their want of fastidiousness in such delicate problems as the variations of the C sharp minor Quartet present. The inimitable scherzo movement, at least, was perfect, with never a flaw in the humorous or witty points of detailed rhythm. In the last movement sheer virtuosity of execution is necessary to bring any good effect out of the broken music, and in the triumphant solution of this problem the great resource of the quartet was shown. There was a large audience and the greatest enthusiasm prevailed.

Everything promises well, therefore, for the festival, and if everything goes on well and the enthusiasm is maintained and grows, infinite credit will accrue to the musical taste of Manchester. To-night, at the second concert, the great feature will be the glorious F major Quartet of the Rasoumoffsky set. No other work of this kind goes off so bravely as this, with its broadly moving bass melody bearing upward from the six-four chord, which was almost a forbidden thing at the time this work was written. But more of this work when we have heard the Lener players in it.

## *THE LENER QUARTET AND BEETHOVEN.* III.

Quartet in A major, Op. 18, No. 5.
Quartet in F major, Op. 59, No. 1.
Quartet in D major, Op. 18, No. 3.

THE second Beethoven concert of the Lener Quartet confirmed in every way the good impression of the first, and as there was again a fine audience and much enthusiasm the success of the festival may be reckoned as established. The rich tone, which never for an instant loses beauty, the equal part borne by the four instruments, the dazzling execution and the perfection and consistency of every detail are the great technical marks of the Lener players' supremacy. To think them perfect we have to go with them in one thing the fidelity of which to the composer's ideas is open to some doubt.

It is generally understood in music that where a melody is leading it should be given the salience which a sensuous consideration or feeling for its importance demands. In music of Mozart, Haydn, or even Brahms the correctness of such a reading would never be doubted. The conflicting point in Beethoven is that although Beethoven never leaves a single note of his music without definite marks of expression, he never, or very rarely indeed, makes any provision in these marks for the melodic salience which in all other composers would be taken for granted. Always, or so nearly always that the exceptions may be left out of consideration, the same mark

of expression applies to every part in his scores at the identical time. The salience of orchestral instruments, it may be held, is in itself sufficient to controvert this general theory, and does away with any idea that Beethoven would interpret this identity of marking in any strict sense. But any one who remembers the conducting of Hans Richter will remember that he often, in rigidly maintaining the identity of marking, was willing to persevere with what were, in the sensuous and even the purely musical view, very unmusical results. The result in these cases was often one of great ruggedness, directness, and barbaric strength. In this view the habit of the Lener players does not altogether agree with what we believe was the Richter practice. They apply to the problem of melodic salience in Beethoven something more like the practice of normal music. They are marvellous players in this interchange of melodic salience; and they exercise a marvellous discretion in their application of it. They do not let go the strength or the general traits of Beethoven's style in any perceptible way. Their chief modification of the normal reading is in the salience and beauty of the melody itself. In the tenacity of the less salient notes there is little flaw or fault to find.

Mr. Lener, if our ear judges truly, will have nothing to do with the metal E string now so popular. He carries the expressive tone, and the full breadth of tone, to the very highest altitudes of his instrument. It is melody over melody, all the way. The great climax of tone, up to the high C, where, in one passage of the night's music, all the instruments ascend in their full strength, was a supreme example of superb tone, and it made a moment that for us will not be easy to forget. But it was only one of many cases in which the melodic power of the violin, as it reaches altissimo, was shown with thrilling effect. We have no hesitation in praising absolutely the breadth of conception and style which made these moments possible. What especially made the effect of the exultant melodies so fine was that they were as bravely supported in the other instruments as they were bravely taken by the leader of the quartet. The deep pathos of the slow movement, in F minor, of the Op. 59 quartet was an effect first of the melody itself and later of a finely

sustained intensity of every detail of the figuration which was spread over the long gamut. The 'cello was exceedingly fine in this movement, and the long pizzicato passage, which began with the utmost ravishment and delicacy of plucked notes, and finally gathered a power that was almost like that of a drum, was most admirably done. The tenderness both of the melodies, and of the undulating notes as the movement softened to its partial end and then reawoke in the exquisite cadenza which leads on to the Russian air, was as fine an example of power, shown in an inverted way. The entry of the three lower instruments in turn, with their rapid falling notes, was so exquisitely timed and executed that the ear was entranced by the sheer technical skill of it. The rough last movement took the instruments a little out of their composure of beautiful tone, and we thought there was a little tendency to slacken the rhythm now and then. But the whole quartet was superb, and the two other works of the evening proved, like the lighter works of the first concert, that the Lener players do not need always the greater masterpieces to show the supreme refinement of their art.

## *THE LENER QUARTET AND BEETHOVEN.* IV.

MR. EDWARD ISAACS has already proved himself justified in the boldness which made his season of International Chamber Concerts into a Beethoven Festival of six quartet concerts by the Lener Quartet. The audience grows with each concert, and is already much better than that of individual concerts in previous winters; and the music is an experience which no one who has the good fortune to hear it can ever forget. The playing is music through and through, and one cannot but admire more and more the persistence of endeavour by which through every roughness of the composer the beauty and richness of musical tone are kept. The great technical feat by which this triumph is made possible is, of course, the splendid melody-playing by Mr. Lener himself on the very highest notes of his instrument. There is never

any shirking for an instant the expressive task which the great climaxes of Beethoven lay upon him; and never for an instant is he content with mere roughness, or with a mere technical performance, of a single bar, however difficult. But having praised his unique endeavour, we have to remember equally how it is supported by a set of colleagues whose watchfulness is equal to his own and whose own special tasks are performed with the same assurance, boldness, and scrupulous musical feeling.

The (Great) Fugue in B flat, Op. 133, is the least musical of all Beethoven's quartets; or at least it presents the greatest difficulties of any to the players who attempt to turn it or translate it into music. It was the greatest of possible triumphs, then, that this fugue was last night received with a louder and more spontaneous applause than anything in the Festival which had preceded it. The work is not a fugue in any strict sense, and was at first styled an 'overture', a title to which it seems to have no claim whatever, beyond the supposition that you put into an overture anything you like. It is more like a fugal rhapsody. The main subject is introduced in a fragmentary introduction, and then, when the regular fugue appears, this subject appears only as the second of its two subjects. This double-subject fugue is worked out with much enthusiasm, but some monotony in rhythm, melody, and expression. At its close a change is made in all these things, and a semiquaver figure which has been touched on already in the introduction is now consistently employed as a second subject and free counterpoint against the main subject in simple crotchet rhythm. This section of the fugue has great musical and expressive beauty. Then all is turned suddenly into a scherzo dance, in which the elements of the fugue are freely used. An energetic running figure introduced as this movement proceeds is not greatly effective, nor are the final references to the rhythm of the earlier sections. A final scherzo dance has more both of musical mystery and of poetic feeling. The final result of the form is that of short movements in related keys, and sections, of which the themes have been derived a little in the fugal manner. The fugal style has led the composer, as usual, beyond the verge of pure music or the beautiful in music.

How far use might enable any one to believe it music perhaps the Lener players could tell us as well as any one. It was in any case a great feat of playing and an experience which the listener is not likely to get every day, nor ever, we think, to get applied more musically to his ears.

Of the first quartet from Op. 18 the slow movement in D minor is by far the most beautiful part. Is it of this movement that the composer said he imagined the scene in the tomb of Juliet and Romeo? It is rich in its woe of regret and wilful resignation. The curious way in which some of the florid phrases end by throwing out their last note, as though the arms were thrown up in a wilfully despairing gesture, is, we think, a very uncommon sort of idiom for music. The last movement was the perfection of florid playing and of well-timed florid entries.

The E minor Quartet from Op. 59 was remarkable for its refinement. Here again the sinuous and simultaneous movement and expression in the rapid passage work were things to marvel at. One passage of fortissimo semiquavers had a golden sound as the ranks of notes moved forward in perfect exactitude of power, duration, and pitch. The slow movement in E major seems to anticipate the pathos of Schubert. From the introduction of the Russian theme which is used as the first chorus in 'Boris Godounov', the freedom of the playing was the miracle which charmed the roughness of the composer into music. The theme of the last movement had the same brusqueness transformed by a sort of magic into music. It was all truly great playing.

## *THE LENER QUARTET AND BEETHOVEN.* V.

THE muggy weather caused some little trouble with the strings of the Lener Quartet players at the opening of the concert last night, and the characteristic Manchester atmosphere apparently did not suit the fastidious ears of our visitors. Long pauses for tuning interfered with the effective sequence of the movements in the first quartet, that in F major, Op. 135. The opening allegretto movement was given in a cheerful reading that made it quite

acceptable even to the general or casual ear. The syncopated vivace movement did not make its jollity of rhythm felt all at once, but became clearer and more effectual as it went on, and by the end the first great writer of jazz music had made us all partakers of his rhythmical jokes. The lovely D flat melody and the deeply moving interlude of subdued and then tragically poignant notes was a masterpiece of expressive playing. The artful cradling of the melody, on a bass whose billow rises and falls alternately with it, was an opportunity for appreciating the great art of the 'cellist, Mr. Imre Hartmann, whose playing has been a marvel of delicacy and discretion throughout the festival. The second quartet, from Op. 18, in G major, is the least substantial of all the series. There was a feeling in some quarters that its quick movements were taken too quickly and lost thereby something of easeful grace. We hardly shared this feeling, yet found the slow movement, played with rich tone and with every note of its elaborate ornamentation given with perfect clarity and rhythmic poise, the most beautiful playing of the whole. But beyond question the third quartet, that in C major from Op. 59, was both for its own sake and the splendid playing the crown of the evening's music. The opening theme of the allegro, for the violin alone, had nothing whatever tentative about it, but set off with the jollity of some vagabond minstrel. It was full-hearted music from the first, and it won the heart of the listener. The glorious climax that swiftly follows came as a most natural sequel. Later, when the minstrel figure is developed and worked through the four instruments, and compressed gradually to tones of mystery, the effect was exceedingly fine, and again we found Mr. Hartmann's 'cello working with the utmost subtlety of transition. Later again a powerful fortissimo shows the composer playing the lumbering fool with a marvellous dual sequence of thirds. It is gigantic humour that might please a babe, and it was played with a glorious gusto and breadth of style.

There was some discussion whether Mr. Hartmann did not carry delicacy beyond the limits of effectuality in the pizzicato of the A minor movement. He was powerful enough at the other extreme, and some listeners bore witness that they heard every note that he

played. The upper melodies were played with a quiet, penetrating fullness that to our own ear obliterated the plucked notes at times, though the whole was a superb performance of one of the first great romantic movements in music. The minuet loosened out its chains of semiquavers in a glorious way and, most wonderfully of all in the transitional coda, where the notes gain a new significance. The last movement is a movement born of a single idea, if ever there was one. This singleness was one of Beethoven's great contributions to music. Music had become since Bach and Handel, in the hands of Haydn and Mozart, a form in which melodic and rhythmical variety were the first essential thing. Beethoven, when he found his full strength, hewed his music out of the block. Single yet exhaustless in resource and power, his music, in such movements as he gives us here, becomes vast, and in its sublime unity, like the sea. Such a movement, when it was written, must have transformed for its first hearers every preconceived idea of music. When it is well enough played this music always arouses a demonstrative enthusiasm, and the Lener players had their audience standing and clapping for a long time after the concert was ended.

For the penultimate concert two of the finest quartets are included. The Quartet in E flat, Op. 127, opens with the utmost grace, and its leading theme is one of the most graceful to be found in the whole series. The adagio is amongst the most lovely among Beethoven's slow movements, especially in the delicacy and intricacy of its figurative developments. No throng of birds on the earliest of summer mornings makes a more tuneable medley of sounds than these. The scherzo is brusque and energetic in its main theme, and in its middle section, a little after Schumann's manner. The last movement is symphonic, in a way from which Brahms learned much for the final movements of his symphonies. The Quartet in F minor, Op. 95, show us strength in compression. The general rule that music grows more prolix is here very effectively discarded, and few works give us so much of pith in so little space.

## *THE LENER QUARTET AND BEETHOVEN.* VI.

Quartet in E flat major, Op. 127.
Quartet in B flat major, Op. 18, No. 6.
Quartet in F minor, Op. 95.

THE dual slow movement of the great E flat Quartet, Op. 127, served to emphasize the special strength of the Lener Quartet players more than ever. When they lay themselves down on their bows to draw sweetness or melancholy from the slow grooved notes of Beethoven in his expressive movements, then we feel that we have never heard such satisfying tone from four string instruments. Here, whether it is in the naked melodies, in the endless figuration that with Beethoven is never without its part in the expression, or in the chains of ornamental notes which wreathe his melodies into something more divine than simple melody itself can be, always the art of the Lener players is sufficient and satisfying. They have not, with all their fullness of musical tone, succeeded in convincing us that the thousands of dotted notes, or rhythms in which a semiquaver gap does duty for a dot, are as full of music as such emphatic protestations of joy should be. There are two sides to the account in these last quartets, and while some of the works, like the two sublime quartets which are chosen to wind up the festival, almost completely escape the deformity which some movements of other quartets undoubtedly suffer, nothing is gained by a denial that in these works something of infirmity goes with the spirituality which gives such a unique character to the music. For instruments as well as voices, Beethoven in the end forgot that there were limitations, and he forgot also that emphasis does not always carry the day.

The true lover of Beethoven can acknowledge these things, and yet find plenty to make him prize the later quartets as music sent almost from another world. Music has become for ever a more spiritual thing from what Beethoven suffered, and from what was revealed to him in his suffering. We cannot take up a single work of Brahms withoug feeling that the spirituality of Beethoven breathes in every note of it. The symphonic unison of the orchestra has become another thing from his writing. Wagner like Brahms in his allegiance to Beethoven, but what worlds away from him in

the expression of that allegiance, yet owns it as absolutely. The concluding movement of the F minor Quartet cries out aloud the indebtedness of the smaller romantic composers. The Lener players have done a splendid service in emphasizing, not the message of Beethoven merely, but his musical quality. It only remains that both they and Beethoven may be honoured by a completely representative body of Manchester musicians for their last concert. Nor should Mr. Isaacs be forgotten, who has had the boldness to go beyond the routine methods of concert-giving, and has in that boldness done Manchester music-lovers a double service.

## *THE LENER QUARTET AND BEETHOVEN.* VII.

Quartet in B flat major, Op. 130.
Quartet in A minor, Op. 132.

EACH night, we think, the audience for the Lener players' performance of the Beethoven quartets has shown a tangible increase, and at the closing concert the hall was almost completely filled with an audience of representative musicians and music-lovers. At the close Mr. Edward Isaacs and the quartet of gifted players were applauded almost for the time in which another quartet might have been played. The festival has been a real victory for chamber music, for it has shown the solidity and determination of its supporters, who may know now that they have a pretty good foundation for the future. The victory has been one of pure and glorious tone, and the longer the festival has gone on the more emphatic has been the testimony of string players, old and young, to the beauty of the tone they have heard. The players themselves seemed anxious to remove a misconception that they owed their tone, and the unity of style which it gave them, to the teaching of Jenö Hubay. Hubay had indeed done something; but the man who was the great pedagogue, and had built up the finest method of violin teaching the world had known, was a later teacher, Josef Bloch, whose untiring patience was the root of all their success.

There remained for this concert two of the last three quartets dedicated to Prince Galitzin, which three quartets had occupied the composer for three years and which eventually saw their publication a few days after Beethoven's death. The composer, when asked to say that these quartets, and especially the B flat Quartet, surpassed all his previous works of the kind, evidently did not relish any belittling comparison with earlier work, and said that change and progress were essential to all artistic work. But he called the B flat Quartet his 'Leitquartett', and the judgement of the century that has passed since his death has confirmed the justice of his partiality for the work. As the work of a deaf man, these quartets assert triumphantly the imaginative nature of the musical art, and the heritage of this proof musicians may well prize in a world which is apt to associate music, not with the cleansing power of the imagination, but with all the sensuous delights of the world. Literature, though it is born of daily talk, is known to lead men to the heights of austere and tragic thought. It is too easily forgotten that music has its natural home in the same place. One cannot speak justly of the short idyllic dance movements in these later quartets without regarding them as elysian in their very nature, and as removed by their ideality from every contamination of the world. And can we say less of those divine slow movements which are of such heavenly length that they hardly have the power to cease, and whose particles of sound are of such fineness that they are like the moist particles of the air on the loveliest of summer mornings? And, if tears are wanted, where shall we find them more poignant or more profound than in the broken notes of the first violin in the lovely cavatina which was so touchingly played by Mr. Lener? If these beauties are born of human weakness and frailty and rise from the hardness of a mere physical crisis, as the slow movement of thanksgiving for the recovery from sickness in the closing quartet so touchingly depicts, then there is something to be said even for weakness and sickness as an inspiration for the arts. And when with that weakness goes such gigantic spiritual strength as the overtowering attempts of these quartets also show, then we may regard with a solemn

pride the human nature which is capable of such efforts in such extremes. It is something to belong to the same race of beings as Beethoven.

## *THE BRAHMS VIOLIN SONATAS*

MR. MAX MAYER, who for a number of years was the most active apostle of Brahms in Manchester, has, it seems, among his many other exploits for the composer, also given, with that superb Brahms player Marie Soldat, the three Violin and Piano Sonatas at a single concert. He was present, with many other colleagues of Mr. Forbes and Mr. Catterall from the Royal College of Music, to hear their performance of the sonatas, as was Dr. Brodsky, who has also many a Brahms record to look back upon. For the time being no one can have enough of Brahms, and Manchester has become almost identified with the composer through the sheer number of Brahms performances which are given.

There was a sort of special audience for the concert, and perhaps it was the younger part of it that was responsible for the emphatic applause which followed every movement of the first two sonatas except one. For some inscrutable reason the applause ceased in the intervals of the third sonata, which was heard in silence to the end. The performance of this sonata, we thought, fully deserved the extra deference shown to it, for it had more warmth and intensity than the earlier sonatas. It was plain to be seen that the favourite movement of Mr. Catterall in the three sonatas was the slow movement of the third, which he played superbly well. There was, of course, both in the technical and the musical sense, a kind of perfection about the performance of the whole three. Both players are, we may say, emphatically players who go about their work with a security and comprehensiveness which only fine players can command. They are no mere musicians, agonizing to get their emotions expressed either by one means or another. The emotions are hardly the first thing we think about with regard to the one or the other, but a musical capacity which comprises emotion among many other things. Like Brahms him-

self, we may say, they clothe their musical sensibilities with a tough exterior of hard understanding, which by its activity almost precludes their existence. Yet Brahms has in the end been proved to have sensibilities as fine as any man, and our two players, as their exposition of Brahms showed, are in much the like case. The three sonatas have won a unique place among works of their kind since the sonatas of Beethoven. The first, in G minor, or major, as you may like to think it, is curious among the instrumental works of Brahms in being not self-fashioned, but having its birth apparently in a song. Yet it bears all the marks of absolute music, and even illustrates more than any other work of Brahms that thematic connexion of movements aimed at by Franck and other writers as a post-Beethoven development of the sonata or symphonic form. The main section of the composer's 'Rain Song' is found almost intact as the recurrent thematic section of the concluding rondo movement, and this would seem to be the germ of the sonata. The opening subject of the first movement seems directly born of it and sets the mood for the whole opening movement. The theme of the slow movement, again, is worked into the development of the concluding movement and there borrows the characteristic accompaniment figure. The slow movement has a grandeur of its own, but the whole sonata is very subtly and naturally bound together.

The second sonata, in A, is more spontaneous in melody, and has latterly tended to become the favourite. It opens with a hint of the 'Prize Song'. The natural exaltation of the melody and the slow movement is developed with great beauty and resource by the two instruments, and the rapid interludes illustrate the combination of middle movement forms of which Brahms was so fond. The deep and dark subject of the last movement is of rare beauty, and has in its darkness the rich glow of some deep empurpled cloud. The sense of the tragic ballad strikes us at once in the opening of the last sonata. As the slow movement we have an intense lyric, and next, as scherzo, one of those refined and sceptical expressions of humour which were Brahms's own. Then the rough energy of the composer breaks out in a knotty finale.

## *THE BRODSKY QUARTET AND ELGAR, NOVEMBER* 1924

YESTERDAY was far too muggy for happy string playing, and the Quartet of Elgar is too broken in its melodic style to enable the instruments to make any sonorous impression on such a day. Its choice for the Brodsky concert at noon was therefore unfortunate. When the players afterwards added the variations from Schubert's 'Death and the Maiden' Quartet the contrast both in warmth of tone and in certainty of conception was remarkable. This beautiful and familiar movement has in our experience found no more moving interpretation than from Dr. Brodsky. He is not content to take the interjections of the violin for a mere embroidery, but gives to their broken pathos its natural poignancy. The variations are so marvellously prepared by the close of the opening allegro movement that there is a decided loss in hearing the variations without this movement. But Dr. Brodsky has such an immediate and complete mastery of this music that its tone was set instantaneously and was maintained absolutely.

The broken and swift energy of Elgar's music fared less well. The interpretation seemed to lack a real unity of mind, and the ideas were hardly worked with a complete unity of purpose through all the parts. One may say definitely against Elgar's music, in such a work, that its energy is not altogether to be gathered from a sensuous or strictly musical reading. It is in a sense extraneous and athletic. In choosing a certain motto from Shelley, as pertaining to his Second Symphony, Elgar has pronounced what for ever must remain the most probing criticism against himself. The spirit of delight does not come always into his music, and when the listener comes across it in one of its off days, he will go far towards denying its beauty and its life altogether. We did not quite fall into this mood yesterday, for the last movement was in many places most brilliantly given, and the exquisite melodic balance of the delicate middle movement was finely adjusted; yet there was a coldness in the music which matched the dampness of the day, and it could not entirely be overcome. It is not always easy to follow the spirit of the composer, as it passes so swiftly from peak to peak; and if one must believe the only understanding that offers itself, it is not easy to regard the composer's work as altogether certain of its

effects. If we go so far we have to make demands on the performers altogether beyond those of normal musical readings. The Brodsky Quartet, as at present constituted, contains four players of very distinct individuality, and though they do not lack a strong basis for unity, it is an agreement not of taste but of a rough virility, and must in each work be won before it can be triumphant. In Elgar's Quartet this virility does not yet seem brought to an effectual interworking. The success was therefore intermittent and was too much in Dr. Brodsky's own playing. No other instrument than his took its full part in the generation of energy. That problem, as we have said, does not seem to be wholly a musical one. It is a case of finding energy in the music by a sort of divination, or, it may be, even of imparting it. The music is rich in English hardness.

## *MAX REGER QUARTET IN F SHARP MINOR, OP.* 121

Few works, even of Reger, rely so much on the niceties of chromatic and changeful tonality as the Quartet in F sharp minor, Op. 121. How its subtleties may fall on the casual and unprepared ear is a question, perhaps, not to be asked; there is work enough in any case, even for the ear that is prepared and informed, and work enough, too, for the players to keep an informing and expressive sense of tonality in the music. The point of the whole work may be said to lie in these subtleties of changeful intonation. The listener is allowed no rest from them, and, while they undoubtedly have their technical interest for the musician, he may well sigh for a few plain things, and for some more tangible hold on the emotions of life than these refinements of his craft afford. We suppose that in the days of Haydn and Mozart, when a composer would write a new symphony or other instrumental work with each returning day, composers of instrumental music were almost reconciled to confine the interest of their art within the felicities of its technical craft. But Haydn and Mozart never wrote crabbed music. The main lines of their music were easeful,

dignified, and gracious. Our quarrel with Reger is that he so often places ingenuity first, and that his wit and humour are so all-sufficient to him that he divorces them from dignity and beauty. Familiarity would, of course, do much to increase the delight which the musician may feel in this quartet. But would it ever make us feel that its ideas were sufficiently endowed with dignity and beauty? Reger was emphatically a full man. His invention is so fertile that the sheer abundance of what he writes gives the impression of genius. But if we look through this quartet for single ideas of indisputable strength it is hard to build up a good case for him. We come down to an admiration for his musical prowess. In this quartet, too, Reger is shorn of what is most poetic and passionate in him. Those deep grooved harmonies which are instinct with the full force of modern music and are free from all littleness and meanness find no place in the dry medium of this quartet-writing; even the slow movement, masterpiece of harmony as it is, cannot claim any full stream of passionate feeling. We are left with a plentiful ingenuity and humour, in which the work abounds, but without any sense that he has either given us the complete man or completely satisfied our sense of beauty. That the appeal of such music will get beyond those consumed with the art of music it is hard to believe. The work was presented with an admirable skill and with the ripe musicianship and geniality of technical handling which it so loudly asks for.

We are asked to believe that Beethoven himself, in his later years, spoke slightingly of his ever-popular Septet, and in a sense turned his back on it. We do not know how that may be, but the work will do well enough, in any case, to point the moral against Reger's want of fibre and plain centrality. Beethoven did not run away from the ideas which stood plainly before him. When he chose to emulate the vulgar manner, he did it with so much assurance and geniality that it has its own sort of grandeur, and every heart must go with him.

## *THE BOHEMIAN QUARTET, FEBRUARY* 1923

THE Bohemian Quartet, which is probably the most genial quartet in the world, does not immediately dispel the idea that the present platform of the —— Hall is radically unsympathetic for string instruments. Even their tone gives the impression of dryness, and all the nervous vibration of their style does not banish the feeling that it is a sort of cruelty to place string players on this platform at all. To say their style is Bohemian is to say that it is in the best sense enthusiastic and even familiar. Their success in the Quartet by Ravel was gained rather by endowing the work with the opposite of its aloof and archaic qualities than by exploiting them. The work is one which also demands the finest equality of power and interchange of solo work in the ensemble, and in their response to this challenge the Bohemian players showed themselves absolute masters. The work revealed itself under their hands as very much more a work of fixed melodic ideas in the school of Berlioz and his Fantastic Symphony than has been shown in other readings. Each player in turn had his part in establishing this singleness of melodic character, but the playing of Mr. Jiri Herold (viola) had an astonishing boldness which brought all levels of pitch to an equal melodic plane. The transformations of rhythm and style from movement to movement were not allowed to hide the persistence of idea, nor were the vividness and manifold complexity of detail any more allowed to obscure the unity of the work. We had heard, earlier in the day, an interpretation of Beethoven which by its gravity never quite consented to pass over into the field of humour. The Bohemians, in their reading of the B flat major Quartet from Opus 18, struck the humorous note at once, and never, until they reached the 'Malinconia' introduction to the last movement, consented to leave it. The general reading brought out strongly the relationship between Beethoven and Haydn, and seemed almost more in the temper of the last than of the first. Of Beethoven the master of spiritual suggestion it gave us little or nothing; but of the warm, enthusiastic, and lovable familiar it was all compact. The 'Malinconia' section had a peculiarly Schubertian flavour which emphasized its melodic relationship with some quartet variations, an impromptu, and a romance from 'Rosa-

munde' by Schubert himself. This section had also an extraordinary penetrating effect, or expression, which was the finest single touch of the whole evening. Mr. Karel Hoffman, the leader, was very much the master and controller of the Beethoven work, and he was responsible also for this peculiar stroke of genius in expression.

Mr. Edward Isaacs joined the Quartet in the final performance of Dvořák's A major Quintet for Strings and Pianoforte. He played very brilliantly in the rhythmical Scherzo—if that title is a fitting or sufficient description of this lovely movement—but in the main his playing hardly seemed to expand the style of the Quartet, and rather fostered a tendency towards the brilliant miniature. In tone the admixture of the pianoforte enlivened the dryness of the high notes, and the closing movement had a finer precision than anything else in the concert. Mr. Josef Suk, the composer, is, of course, the second violin of the Quartet, and if Mr. Ladislav Zelenka, the 'cellist, does not keep us from regretting the loss of Mr. Wiehen, the famous 'cellist, who was before the war the most genial and popular figure of the whole combination, it is not because Mr. Zelenka himself has anything less than an abounding geniality.

## *THE CATTERALL QUARTET IN BRAHMS, DECEMBER* 1924

Quartet in B flat, opus 67.
Quintet for Strings in F, opus 88.
Quintet for Clarinet and Strings in B minor, opus 115.

THE concert was a crescendo of interest. We still believe these works capable of growing on the players as well as the listeners, and that though the performances were in every way lovely, the music will grow richer yet, as it becomes more familiar. The artifice of subordination hardly needs to be followed as consciously as it was; for the melodies of Brahms, when played as finely as they were, are well able to look after themselves, and are all the more expressive when they have something substantial to pull against. A richer mass of sound might still be vitalized without any loss to the quiet happy feelings with which the music of Brahms is

blest. That the players and the public begin to enjoy now the rich happiness and what we may call the chime of his music is a thing on which we may openly congratulate ourselves. Brahms has a song that speaks specifically of the sweet chime of happiness, and he translates the words so deliciously into the terms of his music that Brahms lovers can easily perform the service for themselves of associating these ideas with his music generally.

The performers seemed to become intoxicated with this special aspect of the composer's expression and sought out his sweetness even a little at the cost of his strength. But what a store of sweetness they found! Mr. Catterall played like a man bemused. During the superb fantastic section of the slow movements in the Clarinet Quintet he seemed to gather up the whole essence of Mr. Mortimer's lovely playing into the ravishment of the coda which he added to the clarinet solo. In the coda of the opening movement, where the second violin takes the melody, he seemed only jealous, for an exquisite place of hiding, where the minute tones of his figuration might be heard in the most intimate way. Brahms, it is said, was moved to tears by the unexpected beauty of the clarinet in this slow movement when he first heard it. Mr. Mortimer has certainly sought out every avenue of beauty and poignancy by which the heart of the listener may be moved; and many a listener last night must have been surprised, first at him and at the insight which he displayed, but yet more at the abounding beauty which this music at every turn reveals.

Death touches the minds of men, Virgil has told us, and in such a poetic way that we know he means that death touches peculiarly the springs of poetry. Of music, which is even more than the art of poetry an art of cadence, the saying is especially true. Of Brahms, as of our own Parry, it is true that the thought of death, and still more the approach of death, gave him his most poignant and at the same time his most blissful music. Of that music the Clarinet Quintet is the most exquisite.

## *MOZART AND THE CATTERALL QUARTET, OCTOBER 1926*

Quartet in D major (K.V. No. 575). Mozart.
Quartet in C major (K.V. No. 465). Mozart.
Quintet in G minor (K.V. No. 516). Mozart.

TRUE lovers of chamber music in Manchester have been fortunate in having the chance to hear two complete evenings of Mozart superbly played within a period of nine days. The Catterall Quartet has always been specially attuned to Mozart, in contradistinction to the Brodsky Quartet, which was always at its best in Beethoven. Familiarity does not bear so hardly, we think, on the varied, the easeful, and the purely musical Mozart as it does on Beethoven, whose music has in it a greater admixture of the sublime. The plain and a sometimes bald singleness of idea are essential to the sublime, and these things have a tedium which familiarity in the end drives home to us. The variety of Mozart begins with less appeal to our reverence and veneration, and, after promising less, often gives us more than our expectations of it. We are not asked to await sublimities; yet at every turn we meet such moving and such wounding things that we feel something very like the sense of sublimity in our being before he has done.

There was a sort of crescendo in this effect during the course of this concert. The D major Quartet with which it opened, which was styled by the Lener players the solo quartet, is a work of easeful dexterities whose lightness of bearing is their highest grace. It was the least beautiful of the three works last night, probably just because it had a bright, soaring disposition, and the acoustic of the hall, where the Catterall Concerts are this winter held, is of a sonorous type that, while giving great beauty to the lower and medium notes of the quartet, is apt to be a little overpowering with the upper notes. In the later works given, the players had learned to temper these effects a little, and the deeper sadness of the music also helped to soften and darken the tone. We often find ourselves at difference with string players on the duration of staccato notes; and in the menuet movements of both these quartets we found the detached crotchets strike our ear as too short for the dignity of the rhythm. This we thought was especially the case

when, after the double-bar of the first menuet, the style becomes strikingly symphonic, and the bold C natural, in unison, asks both for strength and, to our mind, a certain sustained power. We voice not any special quarrel with last night's concert, but with the great mass of string players whom we have heard during the last thirty years. The Catterall players are fine players enough, and have shoulders broad enough to bear the burden of it for the rest.

The Quartet in C, with the extraordinary opening whose musical quality has been so much debated, is in the main of much fuller working. Mozart, like Brahms, is one of those rare composers who seem to take on a greater ease the more they burden themselves with complexities. The balanced power of the Catterall players found a splendid medium of expression in the closely-knit quick movements of this work. Mr. Park has added power to his playing, and might, we think, even venture farther in the same direction yet. Mr. Simon Speelman, whose viola playing became a model for Manchester ears, was never afraid of even a little raucous tone when it produced any characteristic effect. We think that on occasion that is the right way to use the instrument. But we must transform our criticism into a compliment; for in the succeeding quintet Mr. Park played with such expression and energy as we have never before heard from him, and made the first viola part a great feature of the work. From the moment when the first viola took up the theme on the opening page to the end his playing had an arresting quality that was most admirable. It seems unjust to liken the opening movement of this work to Mendelssohn; but to be like Mendelssohn at the time this work was written was something of a miracle, and this music does seem to show us what Mendelssohn somehow ought to have been. His passion and his imagination failed him for the task. The trio of the menuet movement shows Mozart supreme in his art of turning a cadence to account. He takes the minor cadence of the main section and, by one of the slightest turns imaginable, turns it to such an exquisite major subject that for very tenderness and joy it brings the tears to the eyes. Joy, says Keats, 'whose hand is ever at his lips, bidding adieu'—that is a very exact description of the way in which Mozart turns

over and over this exquisite cadential phrase. The adagio on muted strings which follows is one of the most moving movements he ever penned. How powerful and poignant are the lean and single notes; the slow descending phrases how grave, and how grand the ultimate working of the movement! The short introduction to the last movement, with the plucked strings for the 'cello, takes us to a certain passage in the later part of the 'Magic Flute'. We are here in Mozart's holy of holies, and though he turns away to write a Papageno-like air for his closing movement, the impression that we have heard a great work is not disturbed.

## *THE FLONZALEY QUARTET, OCTOBER* 1922

THE strength of the Flonzaley Quartet is, of course, in the perfection of its ensemble, which was first gained, as everybody knows, by the isolation of the quartet for combined rehearsal at the Château Flonzaley in Switzerland for a twelvemonth before it came before the public. Though its members are of different nationalities, one may venture to say that the quartet represents the French school of playing, by the finish of its technical style and craftsmanship. Its programme included no French music (unless one may regard the 'Fantasy' Quartet of Eugene Goossens as belonging to that school by allegiance), but was drawn from the German masters in the Viennese school of Beethoven and Schubert. The audience seemed to have a great and very general admiration for the playing throughout the whole concert. Our own feeling was that the Quartet Op. 29 by Schubert was less well served by the finely pointed playing than were the quartets by Goossens and Beethoven. Whether the quartet by Goossens is very much more than a work of fanciful and intricate technical effects we doubt; but in contrast with the quartet of Schubert it was so finely given that without liking the work greatly we enjoyed its performance vastly, and found it far more stimulating than that of the work of the more accepted master. Schubert is, perhaps before everything else, a sweet and dreamy writer, and to judge by our

first night's experience we should say that composers are not often allowed to dream while the Flonzaley players are around. Beethoven, one might note, by a comparison of effects under the hands of these masterly players, is almost entirely a syllabic composer, benefiting by evenness and certainty of deliberate stress both when his music is energetic and broken, and when it is smooth and poignant. We did not feel altogether that their interpretation had the fullness and gravity of Beethoven; had that been the case, we could not have regarded the quartet as typically French in style. But the evenness and sustained intensity of the adagio movement were so admirable that, although the sweetness of the movement was not wholly revealed, the hazardous duration of the movement was not felt, and the lovely smoothness of the flowing quaver motion sustained the heart until the very last note of the 'cello died away. The movement is not, perhaps, in its expression quite a typical Beethoven movement, but it is one of those in which he finds with a rare surety the typical expression of the string instruments. We rather thought the players sustained too lightly the long holding notes of the movement and laid the stress too exclusively on the moving notes. But the gradation and linking of the moving notes as they went from instrument to instrument was something so passing admiration that we feel inclined to forgive what we think was a somewhat illegitimate means of assuring their prominence. In the third movement we greatly admired the main section but found a want of warmth in the Russian theme of the middle section. In the last movement the rapid gnomic figure, which so inimitably ushers in the returning subject, was a masterpiece of refined and sublimely humorous execution. To hear such a passage one should be willing to go a very long way, for its effect is something not soon to be forgotten. One may recall, for comparison, the similar effects in the last movement of the composer's F sharp major Sonata for pianoforte. Such things are lying instinct, one may say, in the very form of music. But though there have been great masters of the classical forms besides Beethoven, what masters have unlocked these secrets of musical form in any comparable way? One may go back to Bach and say that in the episodes of his

C sharp major we may catch a glimpse of the same art; elsewhere we shall not find it, except in the music of Beethoven himself.

## *THE BEETHOVEN QUARTETS, NOVEMBER* 1920

MANCHESTER began its musical commemoration of Beethoven's birth very unostentatiously by sending a most modest audience to the first of the six quartet concerts at which the Edith Robinson Quartet will give the whole of the master's works for string quartet. Age rather than youth preponderated in this audience, and one missed, somewhat regretfully, the representative band of students that might profitably have heard these compositions in a systematic way.

We are not wholly certain whether it is not a greater distinction for a composer to be rather neglected at the present time than too much run after. The times are out of joint, and aesthetic sensibility is apt to be both blunted and disturbed. Certainly Beethoven has been neglected during the past few years, and the neglect has gone beyond what is due to the prejudices and antipathies of war. In Manchester Dr. Richter, Dr. Brodsky, and Mr. Egon Petri had given us a pretty exhaustive survey of the composer's works during the years before the war, and little more than the opera 'Fidelio' and the songs were left unknown to the general public. We had gained a tolerably good idea of what Beethoven had contributed to the world of music, and we had an unbounded veneration for it. If we compared him with his immediate predecessors, Haydn and Mozart, we find that he had contributed sublimity rather than beauty, and that he had intellectualized more even than he had expanded the symphonic form. Mozart and Haydn, and one might even add Handel and Bach, had been content to be logical as a matter simply of style and artifice. Not so Beethoven; he sought by the means of logic to penetrate to the imagination, and to reveal all the hidden secrets of the heart. He lay in wait for his listener, and then, by secret means, pierced him or, with sudden power, overwhelmed him. He fell also on our ears with a portentous, slowly-moving sound, of which perhaps Gluck, more than any

other, had known the secret; but Gluck had let the tremendous weapon fall idle and broken from his hand. Beethoven took up the weapon again, and applied it with all the force of persistent logic and form. Beauty, ever flowing, radiant, and sensuous, might suffer, but in the face of such power we did not mind. We thought such sublimity something better, and, with a sublime humour to lighten our darkness, we began to think we might never miss it. But the sublime is simple; we soon get to the end of its fascination as a plaything; we begin to question its tedium; we long for something more companionable; we return with enlightened eyes to the love of beauty. We close our Beethoven and turn either afresh to a more brightly-hued life and a freer, more contemporary art, or back to Mozart and his predecessors, with an eye made more critical by great thought and sublime associations, but more alive to sheer beauty and the easefulness of pure form.

Some such course, we imagine, the typical musician of the past and present generations has gone through with regard to his affection for Beethoven. Then the war has come, devastating our remaining sensibilities for the composer. We are made sick of sublimities and the moral view that goads life to a blank heroism. Is it altogether fair, this weapon of sublime and infinite considerations, which we see hurled at us from every hand? We express our own inabilities, having loved Beethoven as we believe all have loved him. If we do not feel up to commemorating his birth worthily are we altogether to blame? Let our past plead for us. There is something deeper in the connexion between life and art than can be comprehended in an abstract formula, and a present inability to worship Beethoven may be a very part of our love for music. Let us do what we can, but let us be honest about its limitations.

## *THE BEETHOVEN VIOLIN SONATAS, FEBRUARY* 1921

THE ten sonatas of Beethoven for violin and pianoforte tend rather, when compared with the solo sonatas, to confirm the view that the duality of instruments makes for miscellaneous con-

tent. Not until the Ninth Sonata—the 'Kreutzer' Sonata, which is by far the most famous of the series—do we find, even for a complete movement, the originality, energy, and singleness of imagination which are so remarkable in such solo sonatas as the 'Pathetic', the 'Moonlight', the 'D Minor', the 'Appassionata', and the 'Waldstein' among the sonatas of the earlier periods. The 'Kreutzer' Sonata is, indeed, among Beethoven's very greatest works, and not all the comparisons which would belittle its second and third movements, or those which speak of it as a creation which began with its tail, and a very weak tail at that, can do away with the perfection of its separate movements, its superb contrast of style, the inimitable loveliness of its finale, the perfection of its variational ornament, or the sublime energy of its incomparable opening movement. To find what is rare in the rest of the sonatas we must begin with the last of the ten, in G major, which has not only a wonderful and wonderfully ornamented melody for its slow movement, but, in the last and opening movements, a great deal of the blissful artlessness which so often makes the later music of Beethoven like some heavenly idyll. The Sonata No. 8, in G, is one of the most perfect, and has not only a singular vivacity in its quick movement, but a most tender expressiveness in the menuet lyric which does duty as slow movement and menuet in one. The C minor Sonata, which is the second of the series in point of majesty, is a little heavy in construction also, and in the slow movement almost tedious, despite its great beauty. The composer's humorous brusqueness is seen more in the closing movements of this sonata than anywhere else in the series. The composer has considered the open strings of the violin a great deal in his choice of keys, as four sonatas are in A, one in D, and two in G. The Third Sonata in A (No. 6) is the one for the listener of delicate tastes. Its slow movement is perhaps the most beautifully expressive of the whole series, its closing variations have a nimble delicacy, and throughout the sonata there is a frequent melodic poignancy of the most charming kind. The Fifth Sonata in F has a peculiar softness, grace, and playfulness. Its scherzo is something unique in the rhythmically humorous alternations of the instruments.

We have made these notes to assure listeners what good things are to come, for the four earlier sonatas given last night are hardly on the same level of interest. The finest is the Third, in E flat, which was also the most finely played. This sonata is the most freely conceived of all the ten, and has an overflowing technical animation of the most buoyant kind. The figuration follows up one idea after another in the most greedy way, so that the player, especially at the pianoforte, is for ever hastening from one feat of rapidity to the next, enjoying and, so to speak, discovering his own cleverness in the most exhilarating way, if he has only enough of cleverness to fulfil the task as the fancy opens it out to him. These rapid movements were the first to rouse a very large audience, and they were, indeed, superbly given by both players. The slow movement is a lyric in the grand style, and was possibly taken a little too fast for its finest effect. The Fourth Sonata is thin, but has sudden touches of symphonic grandeur in its quick movements, whose melodic movement has something of the lilting style which the composer came to use almost constantly in his very latest compositions. The admixture of scherzo and slow movement in this sonata is highly original, and we may note the melodic searching after a symphonic lateral movement of melody in the last movement, and also certain rugged premonitions of the 'Kreutzer' Sonata.

Dr. Brodsky showed plainly that he means the series of performances to be thoroughly typical of his best style. There was the characteristic energetic vigour which bites itself into the music at the first note and never leaves hold until the work is ended. There is no room in such a conception of music for the half-man or the declining man. The wrestle with the music is to the death, and the invisible entity of the composer's mind is something as tangible as an opponent in the ring. Mr. Forbes is always just something a little more than himself when he plays with Dr. Brodsky. It is past admiration how he scents the challenge of a style so daring and is so unfailing in the way he lives up to it.

## *BEETHOVEN'S OPUS* 106, *FEBRUARY* 1924

MR. FRANK MERRICK had what was probably the best audience of the Noon Concerts season, so far, for his performance of Beethoven's great B flat Sonata, Opus 106, and probably most of his hearers would be hearing the work in public for the first time. The performance was a most masterly one of its kind; whether it is safe for criticism to say it was a true or in any sense a splendid interpretation is another matter. Mr. Merrick did not play the whole sonata like a song, because with so many repeated and broken notes in the score that was an impossibility. But he played it as nearly like a song as was possible, and it must be recognized that in the strictest, or narrowest, or we may even say the truest musical sense this devotion to sustained and *legato* playing was an advantage to the work. If we put the question differently and ask whether the music had the most abundant life in this interpretation, or whether it is at all probable that Beethoven intended it to sound so melodiously, our own answer would be a negative one. We remember a saying of Carl Reinecke: 'It is the nature of song to go up and down; repeated notes are ineffectual in it.' If we accepted Mr. Merrick's song-like reading we should have to turn violently against the composer for his host of such ineffectualities. We should have to break with him from the first bar, and regard him throughout the first and second movements as a barbarian. We should have to be harsh with Beethoven just as we have been complimentary to Mr. Merrick, and say he could be no musician who would pound the notes of the pianoforte in that unseemly way. For Mr. Merrick could not hide altogether the unmusical poundings of this extraordinary music. There are, of course, lovely melodies, even in the first movement of this sonata, and in Mr. Merrick's hands they were played with a beauty that was in every way worthy of them. And the slow movement! What a lovely length of divine melody that is! It has a delicious breathlessness which Mr. Merrick's playing did not perhaps capture; but there is something more in the atmosphere than in the melody of the movement; the melody of this movement in Mr. Merrick's hands had an ideal beauty. What symphony even has a gamut of melody so extended, so profound? For a deep, profound melody, what is there in music

so moving as the deep D major melody whose first long phrase plumbs the depths of the pianoforte, and whose antiphonal strain is a thing enskied and fraught with a divine consolation? 'If I go down into the sea, Thou art there; if I take the wings of the morning, and remain in the uttermost parts of the earth, Thou art there also.' So sang the Psalmist; and there is something of the same sublimity in Beethoven's plunge into the deep and his answering strain of lofty song. There is something of the drum's iteration, too, about this plunge into the depths; something that recalls for an instant all the dreadful pounding of the first movement; something that denies the definition of melody that we have ventured to cite. How profound are the associations of style in a work of this immensity! It is the fashion, as much in the music of Beethoven as in the highest tragedy, to refer all these changeful aspects of musical form to some moral struggle that is going on or depicted in the composer's mind. 'One must have suffered oneself,' says Vincent d'Indy, 'to dare attempt the execution of this Adagio in F sharp minor of such intense emotional power, and hovering between the gloomiest resignation and the most radiant hopefulness!' We wonder how far such a view is true, and how far such sublime transitions, contrast, and associations of style imply merely the profoundest knowledge of music and its nature. The amazing thing is to feel that after all there is unity in such a work. The fact indicates that either the springs of joy and of sorrow are more closely related than we think, or that they are both so greatly softened by the ideality of the arts that we are able to pass from the one to the other as in a dream which relates all things, not so much to life as to itself.

One cannot pass over this movement without noting also the wonderful melismata which at certain places transforms the whole being of the melody. As tears transform life until a glistening joy breaks through the very sorrow of the heart so do these evanescent particles of music, the harmonies and melodies of this divine music, transcend themselves. Mr. Merrick's method of treating the fugal movement robbed it in some degree of its abruptness and strength, but greatly helped to restrain it within the legitimate bounds of music, beyond which it may be held to transgress. His execution

by this means reached a point of beauty which would be impossible with an unrestrained reading. Great players have played this movement in a way that has placed it beyond the bounds of music altogether. Mr. Merrick's playing brings it well within them, yet it does not altogether dispel the tendency to boredom which is brought about even by playing at the other extreme. One is left in either case with the sense that such abnormalities of creation are more useful to the imagination in stretching the confines of music than for any other satisfaction that one can get from them. The great merit of Mr. Merrick's performance was that he brought so much of music rather than that he brought so much of spirit out of the work.

## *THE ROMANCE OF THE ROSE*

[Langford frequently wrote on flowers for his paper. This is an example of the way he did it.]

THE rose is the national flower of England, and supreme as it is among flowers it feeds our pride in our country, and in ourselves, as no other flower. Flowers quicken the sense of beauty so greatly that the right love of them is almost one with the sense of romance, and for the romance that lies in the extravagance of beauty no flower will bear comparison with the rose. Few types of women, even, will sustain that comparison, although there are many types of roses. The rose bursts on us in the full pride of the summer, and is one with it, and is almost the essence of it. After it the summer has nothing further to reveal, for the gold of autumn is but decay, and even the carnation that might hold its own with any other flower, though it challenges the rose, and vies with it in every feature of scent and colour, equals it in none, and is by every single one of its charms sealed the rose's vassal. The rose, too, is among flowers the only fit emblem of life. Its blood is rich as our own, and any one who will put his cheek to the cheek of the rose under the summer sun will find that it takes a warmth literally comparable to that of life. To the lover the rose is the lip, the breath, and the heart of his mistress in one, and the poets have

given it this meed of praise times and in ways without number. Nor does the rose ever shame their extravagance. What other flower would sustain such comparison for an instant? And the rose runs the whole scale of beauty, from the blushing simplicity of the brier in which the dew finds a lucky cradle, to the crimson of the rose that vaunts herself the paramour of the midday sun.

The rose can not only be a spendthrift of its charms, but is the one miser whose hoard can give intoxication. Who does not know the rose, deeper than all others, that cups its rich folds and compact scents until a box of spikenard would scarce vie with its rich odour? Again, by what marvellous power does the rich moss rose extract its sweets from its heart, and distil them on its rough coat, or the sweetbrier rose excel the sweetest of herbs? How did the tea-rose filch its odours of the East and retain them amid all the waters of the West, which use their powers in vain to wash them out? And the rose is not merely the most exquisitely scented and compact of flowers when it is not the most profuse and open-hearted, but it can be also the boldest and noblest of horned flowers, folding its petals to a spike of great nobility. In its climbing form it has a grace that would make it independent of flower, and a plant for poets to sing of if it never had a bud. But in this form it becomes the most generous of all, and gives forth its blossoms by thousands until they overwhelm the dwelling over which they grow. The rose, not only in its beauty but in its thorns and its canker and in its death, is the theme of sentiment. When in its splendour it suddenly falls, it dies the most gorgeous death, and after death it does not cease to be cherished, nor do its sweets become extinguished.

Rose leaves, when the rose is dead,
Are heap'd on the beloved's bed,

sings Shelley. But we had vowed not to quote the poets, as their beautiful references to the rose run to many anthologies.



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